

**DEVELOPING A TRAINING MODEL FOR EQUIPPING YOUTH LEADERS IN
A STRATEGY FOR MINISTERING TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN URBAN
COMMUNITIES**

**A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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MAY 2007

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in the loving memory of my Father, John L. Carrington, who was my greatest encourager. Thank you Dad, for believing in me, for supporting my call to the ministry and for affirming me in my areas of giftedness. I would not have been able to do this without the years of inspiration you poured into my life. Thank you for exemplifying what it means to truly care for people, and to reach out to those who are less fortunate. Your legacy of love lives on!

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all who contributed to making this thesis project possible. There are too many to name individually, but please know how grateful I am for the encouragement I received from so many people. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the leaders of my childhood church, Swallowfield Chapel, in Kingston, Jamaica, and the ministry of Youth for Christ that taught me so much about ministering to disadvantaged young people.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to my family who have inspired and encouraged me throughout this journey: to my mother who has supported my academic and ministry endeavors throughout my life; and to my brothers Richard and Ronnie, and my sister Rosie, for their loving support and encouragement.

I want to thank Dr. Roger Felipe, my friend, ministry colleague, and encourager for over 25 years. You have stuck with me, pushed me, and yes ... annoyed me. But this project is finally completed, and I could not have done it without your prodding.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff at the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME) in Boston, Massachusetts, who have modeled servant leadership in the area of urban ministry. A special thanks to those who have contributed to this project: Dr. Eldin Villafañe, Doug and Judy Hall, Dr. Alvin Padilla, and Dr. Gregg Detwiler. Thank you for being gracious and always making me believe: “it can be done.” I would also like to recognize the contribution of Dr. Bruce Jackson, who went home to be with the Lord during my D.Min program.

ABSTRACT

Young people in urban communities are lost, hurting and dying, and the urban church is at a critical juncture at this moment in time. The critical question is: Will the church stand at the sidelines and watch helplessly as we lose our children, or will she take a bold step towards change and become vigilant and proactive in implementing strategies for reaching young people for Christ before it is too late?

Not all urban churches are just standing by, but as this paper will present, there are too many churches that are functionally stagnant at implementing effective models of ministry that will reach them.

This paper begins by describing the status of urban youth – examining their culture, their needs and current trends – and will take a look at why it is so important to reach them with the gospel while they are young. It will examine the plight of the urban church and their struggle to reach young people, disciple them into spiritual maturity and keep them involved in the church for the long haul.

We will then look at a biblical and theological framework for urban youth ministry, providing a biblical basis for a culturally relevant ministry to kids. This project will also examine ingredients for an effective urban youth ministry by utilizing a research tool in gaining insights for effective models.

Finally, this paper will suggest practical models and principles for an effective urban youth ministry, with the hope of being able to inform and impact church leaders on the importance, necessity and proposed methodologies of reaching young people in the city with the gospel of Jesus Christ and to impart change in their lives.

PART 1: CLARIFICATION

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Need for Trained, Professional Youth Workers in the City

¹⁴ Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” ¹⁵When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there¹ (Matthew 19:14).

³⁶ He (Jesus) took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me”² (Mark 9:36-37).

Introduction

There is very little debate that the state of our young people in America is dire. Few will argue that there is a crisis amongst this generation of young people with serious long-term implications for the future. The problems in the urban setting are vast. Issues like poverty, homelessness, drug abuse, crime, gang activity, and sexual promiscuity are on the increase at an alarming rate. Although this is true across the board – regardless of race, socio-economic or cultural background – it is especially true of young people in America’s urban communities. In actuality, problems that used to be considered predominantly limited to the inner-city, have become issues that affect virtually all socio-economic strata and geographic areas in America. The problems of the city, are no longer limited to the *inner-city*.

Parents, teachers, clergy, social workers among others are concerned about young people in urban communities where the risks are so great and the stakes so high. Of particular concern to this author, and relevant to this paper, are issues concerning the involvement of young people in the church. It is apparent that our ability to reach them

¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984).

² Ibid.

with the Gospel, disciple them effectively, get them involved in church, and keep them consistent is diminishing, and the long-term repercussions are alarming. It is becoming more apparent that fewer and fewer young people are attending church, and it seems as if the church is becoming more inept in reaching and nurturing them to spiritual maturity.

Although there are a myriad of Christian youth programs throughout urban America, few of them are specifically geared for unchurched, non-Christian young people. Most of the programs that exist within the church are geared for young people who are already attending church. Too often, programs that are effective in reaching unchurched urban kids are not very successful in getting those kids plugged into local churches. Those programs are usually parachurch ministries that are generally more open to contemporary and innovative models of ministry. Nationally-recognized programs such as Youth for Christ, Young Life, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (to name but a few), tend to have great success in *reaching* young people with the Gospel, but fall short far too often in their ability to disciple those kids into the local church.

As a former parachurch youth worker himself, this author believes that although parachurch organizations have been effective in evangelizing unchurched teenagers – and in some cases discipling them – their greatest weakness has been in getting them established into the local church. Young people tend to respond to the message and methods of the parachurch, but are less likely to get involved in a local church over the long term.

This present thesis will take a look at current youth ministry models in the urban setting, and identify philosophies and strategies for implementing an effective youth

ministry program. It will take a look at youth ministries exemplified in the urban church, as well as those implemented by parachurch ministries, and examine the essential ingredients for an effective urban youth ministry.

Further, this paper will look at current youth ministry *training* models and programs for *equipping* urban leaders in order to determine how to effectively prepare leaders to work with young people in America's urban setting. The overall goal is to look at the reasons why the urban church is struggling to reach and keep young people involved. We will also look at current urban youth ministry models and current training models for youth leaders. Finally we will suggest practical principles for an effective training program for urban youth leaders.

Terms, Definitions and Delimitations

The general age group that forms the focus of this paper are young people between the ages of 11 and 18 years-old. In some cases, we will use a variety of terms interchangeably to avoid monotony. For example, the terms "Youth," "kids," "teens," will be used interchangeably to generally refer to young people in that age group.

This author is aware that a number of terms are used differently in various parts of the country. For example, in Florida, the term "Hispanic," is generally used descriptively of people of Latin American origin, whereas in other parts of the country it is more common to use the term "Latino."

Likewise, the terms "Black," and "African American," will be used interchangeably; but often the terms will be used to distinguish between an American-born black individual (African American), and a black person from a heritage other than the United States (example, those of Caribbean origin).

Various terms will be used to describe the current (and previous) generations, and more specifically – urban culture. Sociologists have used a number of designations for the current generation and the subcultures that are represented. For example the terms: Postmoderns, Mosaics, Hip Hop, are sometimes used to describe the current generation. Some of these will be used interchangeably, recognizing that the current urban youth population largely falls into the category of: *Hip Hop*³ – which not only describes a musical genre, but an entire subculture, encompassing both urban and suburban youth populations.⁴

This paper focuses largely on 2 dominant people groups when talking about outreach: 1) the “unchurched,” and 2) those who have left the church. The term “unchurched” is used to describe people who have not had much of a church background; go to church only occasionally (weddings, funerals, special occasions, etc.); and do not have much spiritual knowledge.

One issue this author is cognizant of is that of stereotyping or generalizing. He is keenly aware that America is a big country. For every comment that is made regarding the “urban” church, there are certainly going to be vast numbers of exceptions. This paper is written with the view that although there have been significant strides in developing effective, contemporary youth ministries, there are still a large number of churches that are ineffectually traditional in their ministry to young people. This thesis project is written with those churches in mind. It is not the author’s intent to “lump” *all* urban churches in one category or another, but to use statistical data to make a case for the need to consider major changes in how we do youth ministry. The writer will use this data to

³ Generally accepted as being born between 1965 and 1985.

⁴ Ralph C. Watkins, *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007), 12.

develop a Biblical rationale for, and a solid paradigm of, *new* ministry models, in order to assist those churches that have not yet adopted a more progressive approach to reaching young people.

The Need

Not a lot is written or mentioned in Scripture specifically about youth or children, but as indicated by the opening passages, we know that children were a priority for Jesus. Unfortunately, it seems as if the priority Jesus placed on paying attention to children has dissipated over the years and throughout the cultural changes. It just does not have the premier focus it once had, especially as characterized in the early church, and exemplified predominantly in Jewish culture. This paper seeks to return to that attention that Jesus designated to his disciples.

There is a plethora of material on Youth Ministry in general, and on Urban Ministry as a specialization, but very little is written specifically on *Urban Youth* Ministry.⁵ Furthermore, most youth ministry books are written with only one particular cultural group in mind – namely, white, suburban youth. Although it is clearly not an intentional omission, most material is written with the dominant culture in mind; particularly catering to full-time, professional youth workers, who typically have trained volunteers who also have a heart for reaching young people. Most published material assume the following:

- An ample number of volunteers willing to help,
- Adequate facilities, vehicles, and other resources, and

⁵ Fernando Arzola, Jr. “Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context.” The Journal of Youth Ministry (5) 1.

- A designated budget for trips, events, camps, and other (often) high-priced activities.

In general, youth ministry books are not written with the urban youth worker in mind – those who serve in complex urban settings rich in cultural diversity, but have limited resources, a limited budget (or no budget), and limited contact with people interested in helping reach urban young people, i.e. volunteers.

Why We Need to Focus on Young People

Why is this research important? In his book on *Real Teens*, George Barna gives several compelling reasons why it is imperative that the Church focus on reaching young people:

1. Teenagers largely define the values and leisure endeavors of our nation.
2. Our economy is substantially shaped by their choices as consumers and by their work habits in the labor force.
3. The nature of the family, the foundational unit of our society, depends on how teenagers prioritize family and approach parenting.
4. The future of the Church will be determined by their faith contours and commitments.⁶

At a local Pastor's conference, highlighting a similar point, Barna referred to the statistical evidence that shows that over two-thirds of those who come to Christ do so before the age of eighteen.⁷ He showed how the prime period to reach people with the Gospel was when they were young – preferably in their young teens – before the pressures of their peers, the culture and life itself begun to influence them away from the things of God. He emphasized to pastors that if they did not make reaching and discipling

⁶ George Barna. *Real Teens* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 18.

⁷ George Barna. Pastor's Conference in Miami, September, 1997.

young people a priority of the church, we stand the possibility of losing an entire generation of godly leaders.⁸

Statistics Regarding Urban Youth

The needs of teenagers in general are vast and complex. Add to the already complicated issues of a) being adolescent, b) growing up in the present American culture, and c) issues of growing up as an ethnic minority, and one would see how complex the issues truly are. Barna makes the case that regarding certain aspects of a teenager's life in urban America, minorities are set apart from their white counterparts. Although the problems once relegated to American inner-cities are now spread out across the country and cross socio-economic and cultural lines; the problems in America's cities are magnified. In contrasting the differences between three races -- White, Black and Hispanic teenagers, Barna points out:⁹

SUBJECT:	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>
Poverty	1 out of 10	1 out of 4	1 out of 4
Annual family income	\$40,000 +	\$25,000	\$30,000
Live with both natural parents	69%	46%	52%
Parents own home they live in ¹⁰	90%	64%	79%
Preference of music genre ¹¹	Rock & Pop	Rap/HH/R&B	Rap
Think about their future every day	2 out of 10	two-third	half
A close friend from another race	50%	50%	50%

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Barna. *Real Teens*, 102.

¹⁰ Urban black kids are also "five times more likely to die from a gunshot wound than is a white teenager," (103).

¹¹ "HH" stands for Hip-Hop and "R&B" for Rhythm and Blues.

Another difference between the three ethnic groups is seen in the area of college education. “One-third of the parents of white teenagers have a college degree. That is double the proportion among blacks and triple the percentage among Hispanic parents.”¹²

Regarding their faith, Barna says that while black teens “show the greatest interest in faith,” white teens “are the group least concerned about the role of faith in their life.”¹³ Hispanics concentrate on “lifestyle comfort”, while “purpose, integrity, influence and faith were comparatively unimportant to them.”¹⁴ White teens see the major hurdle to achieve their future dreams as “the inability to get the education they want and tensions in their existing relationships.”¹⁵ On the other hand, “Both black and Hispanic youths see the major challenges in terms of educational achievement, personal economic choices and opportunities, and the threat of physical violence.”¹⁶

While whites and blacks scored similarly on faith practice issues, Hispanics show lesser interest in spiritual practices. For example, “Hispanics were less engaged in virtually every spiritual endeavor tested: worship service attendance, Sunday School attendance, small-group involvement and youth-group participation. Fewer Hispanic teenagers also participate in youth groups than other groups. Those who do “are drawn primarily by the content that is delivered in those meetings.”¹⁷

Influence of Media

George Barna says teens spend an average of four to six hours per day interacting with mass media in various forms. “Music may be the single most important cultural

¹² Barna. *Real Teens*, 101-2.

¹³ Ibid., 105.

¹⁴ Ibid., 105.

¹⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁶ Ibid., 105-6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

creation of a generation, a special form of communication that is theirs forever, even if it is borrowed or mimicked by others.”¹⁸ In pointing out the importance of music and media on youth culture, Dean Borgman writes:

To understand the world of youth is to feel the cutting edge of cultural change. Each new kind of music, new genre of movie, new fad, and new advertising pitch is a challenge to those who would understand the beauties and pitfalls of our culture and the ups and downs of adolescent years. To do theology in youth culture forces one to be in touch with the spirit of the age and the trends of the times.¹⁹

Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in their exhaustive work on: *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, draw attention to the significant issues facing the Black Church and young people. They point out that “during the 1980’s, the black drop-out rate has averaged about 25 percent nationally, but in some urban school systems, that rate exceeded 50 percent.”²⁰

It is more than just a media-driven perception that the Black family in America is in trouble. This perception is supported by the research. According to Barna’s Research Group, “Over the last few decades there has been a continued erosion of traditional family ties and strength.”²¹ Barna says that 69 percent of blacks born after 1962 grew up in a single-parent home. He reports that only “half of the 8 million black families (46%) include a married couple.”²²

Research shows a very distinctive correlation between growing up in a single-parent home and the high probability of living in poverty. Children growing up in single-parent homes is cited as one of the most common determinants of poverty; this is a

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Dean Borgman. *When Kumbaya Is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1997), 13.

²⁰ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 319.

²¹ George Barna. *African Americans and their Faith* (The Barna Institute, 1999), 22.

²² Ibid., 22.

perpetuating cycle that is not easily broken, and is increasing at an alarming rate. Lincoln and Mamiya address the impact on children growing up in single-parent homes. They state that 49% of all black youth grow up in female-headed households, which means that increasingly many of them are growing up in poverty and their life chances and opportunities are considerably diminished.²³

Regarding unemployment rates, Lincoln and Mamiya report that “During the 1980s black teenagers and young adults, ages seventeen to thirty-five, have experienced extremely high unemployment rates ranging from 40 percent to over 50 percent; in some communities ... the unemployment rate for teenagers soared to 80 percent.”²⁴

The Urban Church and its Struggle

The church has always been an integral part of the lives of African Americans. The Black Church has had a rich heritage of ministering to the people in its surrounding community. Historically, the Black church has stood as the center for healing, sustenance and growth; and has represented stability for Blacks in America for decades. African Americans in particular, and other ethnic groups in general, have had a long tradition of attending church. George Barna attests to the importance of the church as a social institution in the black community. His research shows that 70 percent of blacks see the Church as a central part of their lives.²⁵ “Faith commitment is one of the heritage components that they have retained over the years ...” and the vast majority (87%) claim “Christian” as their religion.²⁶

²³ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 322.

²⁴ Ibid., 322.

²⁵ Barna. *African Americans and their Faith*, 20.

²⁶ Ibid., 25.

But there has been a dramatic change in the demographics of church-goers in the urban setting. People do not “flock” to the church as they once did as a part of their upbringing and heritage. Even more alarming is the fact that even young people who grew up in the church are not staying in the church, but are leaving the church in mass quantities – many whom never return.²⁷

Urban Youth and Church Involvement

In their research, Lincoln and Mamiya pay significant attention to the question: “What is the church doing in terms of outreach programs for young people?” Surveying a group of pastors, they discovered that the top three youth programs sponsored by churches included: youth group activities (such as youth choir, Baptist Training Union, or other youth group) 433 (20.1 percent); evangelism (rallies, revivals, and special services) was a close second with 431 (20.0) percent; educational programs (such as Bible study, discussion groups, lectures, and films) 245 (11.4 percent).

However, 317 (14.7 percent) said that their churches did nothing for youth.²⁸ They point out that the most important roles associated with effective youth ministry are conspicuously absent from the surveys – that of providing counseling for youth (only 1.6 percent of respondents), and those that hired a special youth minister (2.0 percent).²⁹

What is so disturbing is the current church-going habits of young people in the urban setting. There have been dramatic changes over the years that point to an alarming trend. Barna’s research shows that although young people still attend church, they tend to

²⁷ William Myers. *Black And White Styles Of Youth Ministry: Two Congregations in America* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), xxii.

²⁸ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 325-326.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

leave when they graduate from high school. A survey conducted by the George Gallup Research Group showed that:

. . . A flow in religiosity among Americans since the 1930s, which indicate that Americans find religion early in life and lose some during young adulthood, only to find it again as they mature . . . Although religion plays an important role in the lives of many teen-agers, religiosity tends to drop off as teens enter adulthood, and then gradually increase again as young adults mature. This increase in religiosity continues as adults reach middle and old age.³⁰

In a new research study conducted by Kara Powell and Krista Kubiak, they discover that various denominations have estimated that “between 65% and 94% of their high school students stop attending church after they graduate.”³¹ Although the variation margin is high, the point is valid that overwhelmingly, young people are not staying involved in church as they get older, and are not *returning* to the church as they once did.

It is disturbing that “... about one out of three teenagers (who attend church) is likely to actually attend a Christian church after they leave home. To place that in context, twice as many adults currently attend church activities. If this estimate is even close to accurate, it is a harbinger of difficult days for the church. A drop of 50 percent in potential attendees would have a calamitous effect on the American Church.”³²

In a study that focused on the status of faith and spirituality of young adults in their twenty's Barna found some disconcerting trends. What is most disturbing about Barna's findings is that those who attended church as a teenager, were no longer attending church within their twenty's. Barna refers to them as the “twentysomethings,”

³⁰ George Gallup Jr. “The Religiosity Cycle,” The Gallup Organization: Gallup Tuesday Briefing June 4, 2002: 1.

³¹ Kara Powell and Krista Kubiak. “When the Pomp and Circumstance Fades.” YOUTHWORKER Journal, September/October, 2005, 51.

³² Barna. *Real Teens*, 136.

and he points to the trend that shows that when kids graduate from high school ... they graduate from church. According to Barna's research,

Despite strong levels of spiritual activity during the teen years, most twenty-somethings disengage from active participation in the Christian faith during their young adult years – and often beyond that. In total, six out of ten twenty-somethings were involved in a church during their teen years, but have failed to translate that into active spirituality during their early adulthood.³³

As a youth leader, it is disheartening to think that the years of trying to impact young people with the gospel, and ministering faithfully to them will only result in being a distant memory with no lasting impact. As Barna further points out,

The most potent data regarding disengagement is that a majority of twenty-somethings – 61% of today's young adults – had been church-ed at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying). Only one-fifth of twenty-somethings (20%) have maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences. Another one-fifth of teens (19%) were never significantly reached by a Christian community of faith during their teens and have remained disconnected from the Christian faith.³⁴

As this growing trend continues, theories abound as to why this might be the case. Everything from inadequate youth leaders, to a lack of discipleship of young people have been proposed by key leaders as possible reasons for this decline. Whatever the reasons, Barna writes:

Much of the ministry to teenagers in America needs an overhaul – not because churches fail to attract significant numbers of young people, but because so much of those efforts are not creating a sustainable faith beyond high school. There are certainly effective youth ministries across the country, but the levels of disengagement among twentysomethings suggest that youth ministry fails too often at discipleship and faith formation. A new standard for viable youth ministry should be – not the number of attenders, the sophistication of the events, or the 'cool' factor of the youth group – but whether teens have the commitment,

³³ Barna Group, "Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," 12/08/06. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=245>. September 11, 2006.

³⁴ Ibid.

passion and resources to pursue Christ intentionally and whole-heartedly after they leave the youth ministry nest.³⁵

Why are they Leaving?

In responding to the question, “Why do you think young people leave the church?” Lincoln and Mamiya report that 538 (25.0 percent) of the clergy feel that the primary reason is because ‘young people are either bored, and/or the church does not have a relevant program for them’; 463 (21.5 percent) of the respondents felt that the ‘youth are not given a chance by adults to participate in a meaningful way in church programs’; and adults tended to dominate in most church programs.³⁶

Moreover, 316 (14.7 percent) of the pastors felt that young people in late adolescence and young adulthood were in a stage of life, a time to become independent, to search and test things out for themselves. In other words, it was natural for them to rebel against adult authority, express doubt, and not attend church. A smaller number, 144 (6.7 percent), of the pastors felt that young people left churches because they ‘lacked the knowledge and understanding of the church’s importance.’³⁷

Based largely on research done with surveys amongst Black clergy, Lincoln and Mamiya, present a strong rationale for the decline of youth involvement in the Black Church over the last 30-40 years. They cite the lack of focus on the current generation, and the commitment to a more “traditional” approach to “doing church.”³⁸ In one of those interviews, the authors quote a concerned a pastor of a C.M.E. Church who said:

For the first time in Black history, we are seeing an unchurched generation of young Black people growing up in urban areas. In previous generations, you

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 326.

³⁷ Ibid., 326.

³⁸ Ibid., 310.

could always assume some knowledge of Black Church culture, like favorite hymns or prayers or some rituals. Today, there are teenagers out there (in the streets) who have no knowledge of and no respect for the Black Church and its traditions.³⁹

As has been pointed out earlier, the church was for many, the center – both figuratively and literally – of the lives of people who lived in the city. This was true for young and old alike, and many of the children got their start in life in the church. As Lincoln and Mamiya point out,

Perhaps one of the most important functions that black churches performed for young people was to provide a place where they could meet older adults, men and women, who could serve as role models for them. Much of the socialization for children and youth occur through the process of role modeling – observing, evaluating, emulating, and filing away for later use the behavior, examples, and values of others.⁴⁰

Historically, the common scenario was that children were taken to church by a parent, grandparent, or other relative. At a certain age, some children would stop attending, but many, if not most, found their way back to the church, often after having their own children. That cycle has changed drastically in the last few years, and particularly children born in the 1970's and beyond, have been a generation *less likely* to have been raised in church, and thus has become a generation categorized as the *unchurched*.

The cycle appears to be diminishing, and pastors can no longer assume that young people will “find their way back into the church.” Fewer young people are getting their start in the church, and consequently, few are attending when they are older, or returning. Barna says that “Barely one-third of white and Hispanic teens, along with two-fifths of

³⁹ Ibid., 310.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 312.

black teens, say they are likely to continue to attend a Christian church in the future, when they are living independent of their parents.”⁴¹

One of the problems this author has identified is that many young people not only do not *attend* church, but they do not have very much religious background. They are starting from a further place behind – what some have referred to as this generation being “spiritually illiterate.” One of the reasons recognized for so few young people attending church is that they find it difficult to identify with the format, style and general content of the services in the more “traditional” churches. Kids who were raised in the church are used to the cultural distinctives, whereas young people who have not been exposed to the church traditions; who grew up in the “Hip-Hop” culture; or even those with more of a “postmodern”⁴² mindset, are not familiar with the “churched” culture.

It has been this author’s contention that many traditional churches in the city have not stayed relevant with their programs, and since so many young people did not grow up in the church, the church is not able to appeal to a newer generation. To exacerbate the problem further, much of the programming is not geared for the youth themselves. As Lincoln and Mamiya point out, “...a major problem for many contemporary black churches is the disproportionate focus of their programs and efforts on adults. Black youth, especially young children, became a kind of afterthought in the church’s schedule of significant ministry.”⁴³

William Myers makes the case that young people need to be integrated into the whole functioning of the church. Says Myers:

⁴¹ Barna. *Real Teens*, 113.

⁴² The terms Hip-Hop and Postmodern are two common designations of today’s youth population.

⁴³ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 316.

The developmental character of adolescence meant that youth could no longer be described as the ‘church of tomorrow.’ Neither could the task of church ministries for youth be seen simply as ‘inducting young people into the Christian fellowship and preparing them for future responsible roles’ in church life. Instead they must be seen as having the ability to participate with increasing sophistication in the full range of church life and mission.⁴⁴

In contrasting the emphases of the church between Blacks and Whites, Lincoln and Mamiya point out that the focus of most black preachers is the preaching, and Whites tend to emphasize Christian Education (discipleship). Lincoln and Mamiya say, “White folks work from the building of their Educational department, but black folks operate from the pulpit as great preaching sessions. Great emphasis is put upon preaching in the Black Church.”⁴⁵

Regarding faith practices, Barna reports that youth groups are attended by about one-third of America’s teenagers. Black teenagers are likely to attend because their friends are there and to learn more about God. Amongst ethnicities, Barna reports that Hispanic teens are the least likely to attend church, and when they do, they are drawn primarily by the content that is delivered in those meetings.⁴⁶

When considering why they attend church, Barna says “Blacks are more likely to consider the beliefs and doctrine of the church, the quality of the music in the worship events, and the quality of the Sunday School program for adults.”⁴⁷ Hispanics, in contrast seem more concerned about having people their own age and how many of their good friends attend the church.

⁴⁴ Myers. *Black And White Styles of Youth Ministry*, xxii.

⁴⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 316-317.

⁴⁶ Barna. *Real Teens*, 112.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

Even with the increase of youth ministry programs (more prevalent with suburban, middle-class churches), young people are still not growing in their faith, are not staying in churches longer or becoming more involved. According to Barna, “While youth ministry has become a standard ministry program in tens of thousands of churches, and Parachurch ministries geared to serving and developing youth have become a mainstay of the ministry environment, there has been surprisingly little growth in the involvement of teenagers in the life of the Church over the past decade.”⁴⁸

Further, as Powell and Kubiak state, “One of the most distressing findings among the church-going teens is that they have a rather minimal commitment to the Christian faith – In fact, even less commitment than is exhibited by black adults. Only one out of three teens say they are absolutely committed to the Christian faith, which places in comparison to the 50% among black adults. About half say they are moderately committed.”⁴⁹ This author believes that when adjusted for the distinct and complex issues of the urban church, this statistic would be even more devastating to the church in the city.

What Will it Take to Keep Them?

The premise of this project is threefold: 1) In general, the urban church is not effective in *reaching* “new,” i.e. “unchurched” young people, 2) the ones who are in the church are not *staying* in church, and 3) very little is being done to train and equip youth leaders to help stem the tide of this massive hemorrhage of youth-departure from the church. This author believes that young people are leaving the church (or not attending in

⁴⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁹ Barna. *African Americans and their Faith*, 98.

the first place) for a variety of reasons – reasons that need to be addressed and corrected – before it is too late.

Barna examines some of the basic things necessary for effective ministry to youth. He says, “A new standard for viable youth ministry should be – not the number of attendees, the sophistication of the events, or the ‘cool’ factor of the youth group – but whether teens have the commitment, passion and resources to pursue Christ intentionally and whole-heartedly after they leave the youth ministry nest.”⁵⁰

The article by Powell and Kubiak and the research conducted by Barna, point to the need to develop youth ministry approaches that will address the issue of youth staying involved in church beyond graduation. Based on his research, Barna proposed suggestions for youth ministries to be more effective in having long-term, sustaining impact on young people and their spiritual lives. First he says: “One of those is to be more personalized in ministry. Every teen has different needs, questions and doubts, so helping them to wrestle through those specific issues and to understand God’s unique purpose for their lives is significant.”⁵¹ He points out that churches that have been effective, have developed leadership development tracks (discipleship) and a mentoring process to enhance this type of personalization.

Secondly, he suggests that youth leaders (and parents) “develop teenagers’ ability to think and process the complexities of life from a biblical viewpoint.”⁵² This needs to go beyond just “head knowledge” or Bible knowledge, but must translate into helping young people *think Biblically*, and to make decisions from a Christian world view.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Barna cautions that we do not need to be alarmists about the issue but to keep it in perspective. “The truth is,” he says,

... millions of American teenagers and twentysomethings are alive to God and devoted to His Kingdom. But the research is also clear that there are significant issues related to the way young people experience and express their faith. Without objectively and strategically addressing those challenges, Christian leaders will miss the opportunity to awaken many more young souls to a life-long zeal for God.⁵³

Although the situation is critical, there is hope. And the church is strategically poised to win this generation for Christ. But as Barna points out, the leaders must be intentional about reaching out to the younger generation. They must recognize the need for effective youth ministries to be a vital component of the church. And nowhere is that need greater than in our urban churches. We need a comprehensive, consistent, fresh, professional approach to youth ministry for the sustenance and growth of the urban church. This author believes that every church – large and small – urban, suburban and rural – should include at a minimum the following:

1. An intentional, strategic philosophy and plan for a relevant and effective youth ministry program,
2. A plan to educate church leaders and congregants of the need to obtain full support from the church, and
3. A program to train and equip a youth ministry leadership team to implement the plan.

Training and preparing youth workers for ministry is probably one of the most significant needs in the urban church today. It is with the view of the state of the youth crisis (mentioned earlier), combined with the deficiencies of many urban churches in not

⁵³ Ibid.

focusing on youth ministry, and the diminishing involvement of young people in the church that this paper is being submitted.

As noted earlier, most “professional” youth ministry takes place in predominantly middle-class, suburban contexts. Many of these churches hire trained, experienced, youth pastors with a moderate but in many contexts, sufficient salary with benefits. This is virtually unprecedented in most urban churches, save for a few larger churches.

It is the contention of this author, that some of the characteristics and models of the more contemporary youth ministries could be adopted and implemented by urban churches and facilitated by volunteers. Some of the hindrances to that are:

1. Many urban churches do not have access to, nor have an awareness of those models,
2. Many churches are not open to those models that often go against the grain of conventional approaches to youth ministry,
3. Those that are interested don’t have the training needed to implement the models, and
4. Once trained, someone is needed to implement and coordinate the new ministry models. Many churches do not have *that* “someone.”

Church vs. Parachurch Models

It is also the premise of this paper that Parachurch ministries tend to have models that are effective in reaching unchurched kids; and the Church, in general, tends to reach kids who are already involved in church, but have few programs that are reaching and/or keeping young believers involved. This author believes that we could be much more

effective in reaching young people with the gospel if there was a better partnership and healthier working relationship between the Parachurch and the church.

In a report concerning resources for urban youth leaders, Dr. Kara Powell of Fuller Theological Seminary's Center for Youth and Family Ministries, points out that there is a disconnect between the church and the Parachurch. She says:

Outside of annual conferences such as the UYWI (Urban Youth Workers Institute) conference, there seems to be very little networking occurring between youth workers, especially between those from church and parachurch contexts. Given that church ministries tend to concentrate their efforts in discipleship, and parachurch ministries tend to concentrate their efforts in evangelism, it seems likely that greater communication, and even cooperation, would improve ministry effectiveness. Youth workers expressed exasperation at perceived competitiveness between Christian organizations dedicated to serving the same youth.⁵⁴

Another significant problem is that many urban churches are not “missions-minded” in their outreach – they don’t really have a theology of missions. It is more common to see Parachurch organizations like Youth for Christ, among others, to adopt and pursue this approach. Most urban churches focus more on their own community.

Dean Trulear speaks to this in *City Lights* when he says,

Many inner-city ministries target neighborhoods in their outreach. Most churches reflect a parish approach to urban ministry, focusing on communities as the primary repository of social and community life. These congregations rightly feel a sense of responsibility for community wholeness and well-being. But youth programs and ministries that target neighborhoods cast a broad net, reasoning, “whosoever will, let them come.”⁵⁵

In other words, it is not so much that they do not *want* to reach those beyond their walls; the problems are: 1) their programs are not structured to *attract* the unchurched kids, and 2) they are not intentional about going out and inviting them in. Consequently,

⁵⁴ Kara Powell. *The UYWI Focus Group Report*. 12/08/06.
http://www.cyfm.net/article.php?article=urban_youth_worker_strike_zone_UYWI_report.html, 3.

⁵⁵ Dean Trulear, “A Philosophy of Urban Youth Ministry,” quoted in Scott Larson & Karen Free, eds. *City Lights* (Loveland: Group, 2003), 17.

they tend to attract the youth who are already there (whom as we have seen, may not stay). The burden of this author's heart is to explore how to go beyond that. Trulear says, "Many times, targeting a community's youth without specifying a strategy that addresses the identification and recruitment of high-risk youth leads to a program that works with the good kids in a bad neighborhood."⁵⁶

This writer believes that the Church at large, and in particular the urban church, is unarguably the institution that is ideally suited to reach and impact young people in our cities. Many of them have a sufficient amount of resources – both financial and people-resources – to reach and meet many of the needs of young people, and the church is most strategically poised to have significant impact on a young person's life. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, a number of churches in the urban setting are failing to have that kind of impact.

Professional Youth Ministry

Youth ministry as a specialized vocation is a relatively new concept, and really only predominant among large, mostly suburban churches. Beginning in the 1930's and 1940's, and partially spawned into action by Parachurch organizations, the field of "professional youth ministry" has slowly emerged as a professional field, leading to the production of specialized books, journals and resources; full-time positions in a variety of organizations; and developing its own specializations in colleges, seminaries and other formal and non-formal educational institutions.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the average urban church has been lagging behind in capturing the vision and developing the resources to hire full-time youth pastors; developing and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁷ Mark Lamport. "The State of Youth Ministry." Christian Education Journal. 13 (1), 88.

implementing a strategy for youth ministry; and recognizing youth ministry as a viable profession and ministry. It is still common, and quite possibly the norm for urban churches, regardless of size or financial ability, to utilize volunteers or part-time staff, with little or no professional training in youth ministry.

Most people just do not pursue a career in youth ministry. For many urban leaders, youth ministry is either a) a stepping-stone to “real ministry,” b) a limited program that involves the “youth usher board” and youth choir, and/or c) a program that is considered little more than “glorified babysitting.” Although no one would blatantly say so, the mere actions demonstrate that youth ministry is not looked upon as a viable professional ministry career choice in many urban churches.

Mark Lamport points out that many people in the church do not view the youth minister as a professional, but as “a person in charge of activities.” He quotes from Bill Stewart when he says that it is ironic that:

...a person can make a career out of any one of a number of youth-related professions: public school teacher or administrator, probation officer, counselor, teacher in a Christian school, executive roles with the YMCA, YWCA, or Scouts, and the list goes on. The one, however, who would spend his life in youth ministry in the local church has been questioned again and again as to what he is going to do when he “grows” up.⁵⁸

This is especially true in the urban setting where the Senior Pastorate is usually the main, viable and respected full-time ministry position recognized by the church. There are a number of people who would make excellent youth ministers within the context of their local church, but few pursue youth ministry as a vocation. It is either seen as a stepping stone to “real ministry” (the senior pastorate), or it is not recognized as a

⁵⁸ Ibid., 88.

viable ministry of the church at all. As a Pastor, author and former youth worker, Efrem Smith is an advocate of full-time, professional urban youth pastors. Smith writes,

... I think many people who feel called to full-time ministry in the urban church would make terrific youth pastors. With the kind of time and energy a dedicated staff person can bring, lots of positive things could happen in urban communities. But since the senior pastor role is the only one that exists in many urban churches, it's rare to see ministers in the church stay committed to young people over the long haul.⁵⁹

Smith points out that the concept of full-time, paid youth workers was initially introduced by Parachurch organizations such as Youth for Christ, Young Life and others in the 1940's, and later adopted as a model, and quite the norm by mainline, white churches. The models they introduced, he points out, were far more contemporary, and characterized by the concept of "Relational Youth Ministry," versus the previous, more traditional models implemented by volunteers. He says: "The Parachurch has a great influence today on what has grown to become a programmatic approach to youth ministry,"⁶⁰ emphasizing models and tools such as: Relational youth ministry, weekly clubs, trips and events, and getting on the school campus, all models / tools utilized by those who have the staff to be able to implement it and the training to know about it.

Without intending to generalize, it has been this author's experience that most urban churches either can't or won't develop a strategic plan for developing significant youth ministry programs, and making it a priority of the church. Many of these churches are reluctant (perhaps unwilling) to find and implement contemporary models that are tremendously effective for the development and expansion of youth ministries. The key is to find those methods and tools that work best, and implement them into their churches.

⁵⁹ Efrem Smith. "Urban Youth Ministry as a Profession?" 12/11/06. www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/urban/profession, 2005.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

That is the dominant role of full-time, paid youth workers and yet it is what is largely missing from many urban churches.

The Hope

There has been a lot of discussion about “kids at risk.” Issues like the plight of our young people, and the prevalence of gang activity dominate the media. But this author resonates with the sentiment shared by William Dillon who talks about the great possibilities that exist when we invest in the life of an inner-city kid. Dillon inspires us as urban youth leaders to focus on the impact one can have in helping a young person turn around his/her life. He exhorts inner-city youth leaders to “dream a little.” Dillon says,

Instead of a life of sin, rebellion, hatred and violence, is it not possible for us to see young people saved, disciplined, and not only a valued part of the body of Christ but also a productive part of society? Why must they be just more high school dropouts? Why must they live a life of drugs and sex?⁶¹

It is indeed plausible and realistic to believe in a generation of urban teenagers who are turning their lives around, getting an education, and making a difference in our world. Is that too much of a *pie-in-the-sky-thinking*? Dillon inspires us to think, act and believe that way, and this present author agrees.

A Personal Example of Hope

It is rather ironic, that as this author sat down to write this very first chapter for this paper, an African American young adult, about 18-years-old, walked into the computer lab, and started talking with his youth leader about turning his life around. They were searching the Internet for ways he could complete his GED and the youth leader was also helping him to look for a job. As they searched, they engaged in conversation that went a little like this:

⁶¹ William Dillon, “Reaching a New Generation for Christ,” quoted in John Fuder, *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 406.

“Do you think we can ever see the city change?” The young man asked.

“What do you mean?” his counselor replied. With all the intensity and sincerity he seemed to be able to muster, the protégé continued:

“I mean, what would it take to make a difference? Or better still – what does one have to do to make a real difference in young peoples’ lives? What do you need to do to run for political office, or become someone who can implement change?”

Here was a young man from the inner-city, who even as he struggled to rehabilitate his own life, was already envisioning impacting those around him. What an inspiration!

Conclusion

The urban church in America is in jeopardy of losing this, and future generations. It is absolutely imperative to reach young people with the gospel, and disciple them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Further, young people need to be encouraged to take on leadership positions even in the context of the greater church body and function. Young people cannot be referred to only as the *church of tomorrow*, they must be seen as, and groomed for leadership positions for the *church of today*!

Thus our proposed question dealt with in our Hexagonning⁶² research process was: “What are the essential ingredients for an effective youth ministry?” Some of the issues that will be addressed are:

Youth Ministry Programming

1. How can we create youth programs that are attractive to kids, yet solid

Biblically challenging to young people?

⁶² This is a term that will be addressed later in the paper that refers to the Learning Community process utilized in the research section of this paper.

2. What Programs are effective?
3. How do you create the balance?

Theological Issues

1. What are the theological questions that drive the direction of an effective urban youth ministry?
2. What are the Biblical mandates that guide the youth minister?
3. What issues affect having a culturally-relevant youth ministry vs. remaining true to Biblical guidelines and mandates?

Training Urban Youth Leaders

1. What can and should the urban church be doing?
2. How can we train youth leaders more effectively?
3. What is the best context for training?
4. What is the best content in the training? What topics should be covered?

This author believes that more can and needs to be done to reach kids in the urban setting with the gospel, and to disciple them in their faith so that they are committed to Christ and to the church for the long-haul. In order to accomplish this, there needs to be more training programs for youth leaders – both formal and informal – and designed for both lay youth workers and professional (full-time) youth pastors.

This paper is written with the conviction that the urban church is in crisis, and the stakes are too high – the next generation of godly Christian leaders. This paper will thus examine the issue of Urban Youth Ministry with special emphasis placed on developing a training program designed for urban youth leaders.

CHAPTER 2: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The city is an incredible place to live and minister. As one who has worked in Miami's urban community for over 20 years, this author has found it to be a most challenging and rewarding place to live and to serve. Over the years he has had a combination of overwhelming and ambivalent feelings towards the city. One such feeling is that of complete abandonment and totally ignoring the city and its faults, vices and –at times -- atrocities. The other is a complete embracing of it -- what it stands for and represents, and its components – both for good and for evil. It is that dichotomy – that ambivalence -- that has led him to this point of self-examination and introspection that compels him to reflect on his call to the city and to weigh its frustrations along with its victories.

This chapter will focus on the integration of a theology of urban ministry, and to contextualize it for a training program for youth leaders in the city. It will focus on educating urban leaders, with a special focus on training and equipping youth leaders in particular.

The Bible as an Urban Book

The Bible has often been viewed and taught from a rural theological perspective. However, the Bible is clearly an urban book written largely by and for urban people. It is replete with examples of the city, ministry to the poor, and models of urban ministry. Jesus Himself was committed to and seemed to have had a ministry bias toward the poor, oppressed and needy, often criticizing those who rejected or neglected the underprivileged, including children. One thing that is abundantly clear in Scripture: God loves the city.

Commenting on Isaiah 52:7 and 10, Ray Bakke highlights the importance of reaching the city. For “if the city is reached,” Bakke says, “the ends of the earth will hear about it.”⁶³ In light of the importance of the city evidenced in Scripture, it is important that we have a clear theological understanding and view of the city. It is evident that God’s heart is for the city – that he cares deeply and passionately for the city and its people. Robert Linthicum states that what God wants most for the city ...

... is that God’s people – the church – will be humble of heart, contrite, and cognizant of their own sins and therefore not condemning of those in the city who are marginalized, who are poor or powerless or without hope. God wants a people who can tremble in awe both at the work God would do in that city and at the recognition that they are called to be a part of that great work.⁶⁴

No longer can Christian ministry be relegated or restricted to the context of an entirely rural focus. Scripture has much to say about things that are pertinent to the city, and most of the world lives in an urban setting. In fact, there are those who did not choose deliberately to live in the city, but there is a sense in which the city has been brought to them. We must thus be prepared to embrace and participate in the activities and functions of the city if we hope to impact our world.

One of the most poignant times of Jesus’ ministry was in Luke 13:34-35 when referring to the city of Jerusalem, he weeps over its rejection of God and his (Jesus’) desire to care for the city’s inhabitants. As He looks over the city, the emotion expressed in this passage is overwhelming sadness. So much so, it is one of the few passages that refers to Jesus as “weeping.”

Why does Jesus weep over the city? Linthicum suggests that “Jesus weeps over Jerusalem precisely because the potential for the inhabitants’ salvation came to them and

⁶³ Ray Bakke. *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 79.

⁶⁴ Robert Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 39.

they refused it.”⁶⁵ Jesus was obviously deeply moved by the rejection of the people, and his sorrow is most dramatically expressed as He looks over the city – presumably contemplating the people in it, and everything it represents.

Challenges of Urban Ministry

Without a doubt, there are tremendous challenges that go along with urban ministry. By its mere definition, urban ministry is by its very nature challenging. We are living in a whole new world. There are rapid changes in our society from technological advances and industry, to the job market and the economy. Changes abound in our society, and most significantly evidenced in a complex urban city. No other generation of people has had the level or magnitude of problems that we face in this generation. These changes and complexities are here to stay, with the inevitability of more to come, and we must be prepared for them. No other generation of people has had the level or magnitude of problems that we face in our generation.

Robert Linthicum points out that “it is incumbent upon Christians today to recognize and enthusiastically enter into the challenge of the new, emerging world. God is calling the church into the city. Our world is becoming an urban world – and this is an inevitable and irreversible trend.”⁶⁶

Some examples of issues that abound distinctively in urban ministry contexts are: racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and a variety of injustices – such as inequalities in social services, educational access, economic opportunities and the like. The very political systems of urban cities are often skewed to benefit one group over another. This is

⁶⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁶ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, 19.

usually evident in the dominant group of that particular city, and results in powerlessness and hopelessness.

This is exemplified most significantly in this author's hometown of Miami, Florida, where tensions often rise and fall based on the makeup of the local city government: who is in charge, who calls the shots, etc. If they are not representative of the entire city, tensions are likely to flare over one issue or another.

One key issue Charles Stephen Mott identifies that is particularly pertinent to this author's ministry is the issue of diversity within our churches. As this author works with and interacts with a number of different cultures in Miami, he can't help but notice that churches are distinctly divided up based on race and/or ethnicities. One interesting issue that comes up is that each cultural group accuses the other of not being more diverse. Referring to the need for more diversity, and citing the famous quote by Dr. Billy Graham that "Eleven O' Clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America," people are often expressing the refrain: "we need to look more like heaven." But sadly, there seems to be very little intentionality on anyone's part to change the status quo. In referring to this state of affairs, Mott comments:

Our churches are not exempt from this moral myopia. The members of an all white church in a mixed neighborhood may assert that they are aware of no thoughts or acts of discrimination on their part. They may need to see not merely that their outreach really extends only to whites but also that, in a society which tells blacks in countless ways that they are not accepted in equality or association with whites, they must take the initiative if they are to be any different from other white institutions in this respect.⁶⁷

In order to solve the problem, each group cannot just sit by and say: "well, people from other backgrounds are welcome; we're not against them attending." The truth is that they (we) all have to be *intentional* in our outreach. We might not say: "you are not

⁶⁷ Stephen Charles Mott. *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford Press, 1982), 13.

welcome” from our platforms, but it is reflected in our format and styles of doing things. Our services need to reflect a *commitment* to diversity that would attract people of different races / cultures. We have to examine our styles of worship, teaching, etc., and even who is on our leadership team (deacons, elders, worship team, etc.).

Although this author understands the value of cultural distinction – expressing oneself in the culture we feel most comfortable – he believes we can and *must* be more intentional in reaching out to others, and be more embracing and accommodating of cultures. We will be the better because of it, and we will set an example for the rest of the world to respect and emulate.

Linthicum points out that there are three clear themes that stand out in the Old Testament: Oppression, poverty, and peace.⁶⁸ This section will take a look at oppression and poverty in the city, and later we will address the issue of peace in the city.

Oppression in the City

Evil in the City

The city contains much evil. We truly live in a fallen world, and we do not have to go far to see its devastating results. Stephen Mott points out the extent of evil, and the full implications of its potential. This is ever so true in our inner-cities, where crime, all forms of depravity and corruption openly abound. It is the mere existence and prevalence of evil that we are inundated with, and it affects virtually every aspect of our lives. As Mott says:

If sin is as pervasive as we say that it is, if it violates a divine intent which is not removed from history, if it is not tolerable in life but a force which is viciously destructive of person and society, if it is not only against the will of God but against nature, then it will affect not only our personal motivations, decisions and

⁶⁸ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*.

acts, but also our social life. It will powerfully influence our customs, traditions, thinking, and institutions. It will pervert our *cosmos*.⁶⁹

Although he takes great care to express the devastating results of our fallen world, Mott provides us with a treatise for combating our society's evils with a stark mandate to Christians that it is our responsibility – indeed spiritual duty – to address the issues of corruption and injustice. He provides a Biblical model for presenting God's grace to a broken world and for social action for its restoration.

What are the roots of a city's evil? One might say that a city's evil is made up of personal aggrandizement, self-indulgence, social injustice, and idolatry. But according to Linthicum, those issues, as significant as they are, do not get to the heart of a city's sin. He proposes that one of the reasons we are not more effective in urban ministry is that we are “hopelessly naïve about the nature and extent of evil in the city.”⁷⁰ He says the extent of evil in the city is profoundly greater and systemic than the composite of individual sins. We might say the system – indeed the city – is intrinsically integrally evil to its core.

Based on Deuteronomy 6: 4-6 and verses 14-16, Linthicum points out that “The foundation for the building of a nation or of a city ... is relationship with God. True religion is not the observance of liturgies, laws, and rituals, but an active, growing relationship with God.”⁷¹

Linthicum emphasizes that “Authentic corporate relationship with God inevitably leads to a politics of justice. Moses instructed Israel to be sure to ‘keep the commands of the Lord your God,’ to be engraved them ‘upon your hearts,’ impress them on your

⁶⁹ Mott. *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 16.

⁷⁰ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, 44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

children,’ and be consumed with reflecting on them and obeying them in every activity.”⁷²

What is interesting about the commandments, decrees and regulations, is that they are predominantly about justice, not of perfection. Many of the commandments deal with issues related to the redistribution of wealth to the poor, protection of the widow, liberation of the enslaved, limitations on the power of rulers, justice in warfare, safeguarding the welfare of wives and unmarried women in adjudication and cases of homicide, and protection of the divorcee, the orphan, the stranger, the sick, the visitor, and the enfeebled.

It stands to reason that God’s rule of order was to develop a system whereby all people were protected by a system of justice, especially for those who were disadvantaged or disenfranchised. Says Linthicum:

The new kingdom of God that Moses had prepared Israel to institute in the land of Canaan, therefore, was to be the land and city of God, the place God owned. Because God owned this land and freely and graciously offered it and its cities to Israel, the people were to be responsible stewards of it. They were to treat each other and all people around them justly – for they were all sojourners on God’s land (Deut. 6:20-25). They were to eliminate poverty and economic and political oppression and were to protect the weak, because all were created equally as children of God. And they were to love God and live in gratitude to Him, for he was the high King of their land, the One who wanted to live among them and love his people. To love justice, to treat each other tenderly as equal children of God, to live gratefully before God – this the Israelites had to do to maintain god’s kingdom in the cities of a pagan land.⁷³

The Bible records the corruptions of the systems with accumulation of wealth and power and manifested through politics, especially through corrupt kings, Solomon, Ahab and Josiah. This begs the question: Why does Satan use the city? Why is it such a strategic setting? As Linthicum points out,

⁷² Ibid., 49.

⁷³ Ibid., 51.

He (Satan) seeks to capture the soul of a city through the seduction of its systems and structures. In that seduction he uses the principalities and powers (the spiritual dimensions of the systems). By seducing the systems, Satan shapes the conditions of the city's formal groups, families, and the lives of individuals so that he can seduce the people as well. Whenever he is successful in seducing systems or people by means of the principalities and powers, Satan is able to shape profoundly the interior spirituality (brooding angel) of that city and the rest of its institutions.⁷⁴

It is clearly evident that Satan knows the tremendous influence the city has on the rest of the world. The city's philosophies, infrastructure, educational systems, economic structures are integrally tied into and generated from what happens in the cities. The impact of the city is of monumental significance. Its no wonder Satan seems to focus so much of his energies towards those who live in the city.

Poverty in the City

A Biblical Focus on The Poor

Jesus was extremely concerned for the poor. Regarding His very call to ministry and His mission here on earth, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2, saying:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to preach the good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim freedom for the captives,
And release from darkness for the prisoners,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (KJV).

Linthicum writes: "In quoting this passage, Jesus was in effect saying to His hearers, 'the task to which I have been called by God is to preach good news to the poor. I will work to release captives. I will recover the sight of the blind. I will set free those who are oppressed. I will seek the redistribution of the wealth for this country.'"⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

Why are the poor special to God's *Diakonia*? There is a reality, that when people are thrown against the wall – because of finances, suffering, and when they are destitute – they stretch out their hands. They are the ones most willing to receive help (and eventually give help), because they understand the pain. People tend to respond out of their pain.

Why people are poor

One of the questions posed, is: why are people poor? How do they get into what is often referred to as a “cycle of poverty” Professor Villafañe proposes several contributing factors:

1. Laziness – one of the human moral flaws – Certainly not the *only* cause of poverty, but some people might simply be lazy, and unwilling to do what it takes to get and hold a job.
2. Physical or biological limitations – There are clear situations where some people might not be able to work due to physiological conditions that prevent them from being able to work.
3. Natural catastrophes – example: floods, earthquakes, storms, etc. There are a certain segment of the population who have been victims of such natural disasters that have prevented them from being able to work.
4. Disobedience and rebellion – Personal sinful choices and practices.
5. Exploitation and oppression -- Some people are poor because of a system that has either.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Eldin Villafañe. Class notes, 2001.

Whatever the individual situation, there are a number of reasons or a combination of reasons why people might be poor. And we must remember that each person who finds himself/herself in that situation is an individual who is created by God, and whom he loves. We therefore have a duty as believers, as commanded in Scripture, to do whatever we can to try to help the poor and disenfranchised.

Beyond the rationalizations and reasoning, one thing is abundantly clear: we are commanded in Scripture, and compelled by Jesus example to care for and assist the poor. Jesus quotes the words of Isaiah when He says: “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (Isaiah 58:10). As Jim Wallis states:

Social movements need a combination of spirituality and practical goals ... The most successful movements must offer people the chance to better their lives *and* fulfill their deepest moral convictions and aspirations. Isaiah’s wisdom suggests it is really impossible to separate the desire for personal growth from the call for social responsibility. Isaiah’s image of both personal and social healing is one of the most powerful in all spiritual literature ... If you act in justice, you will know the healing that comes from reconnection.⁷⁷

Having looked at the significance of the Bible as an urban book, the overwhelming presence of evil in the city, the importance of the poor and disenfranchised to God, and Jesus’ own compassion for the city, it is time to turn our attention to developing a theology of urban ministry.

A Theology of Place

We have mentioned earlier that God sees and is concerned about the city. He takes the city seriously, and He is indeed in the city. It is thus important that we take the city seriously. Scripture is replete with an unwavering commitment and intrinsic love for

⁷⁷ Jim Wallis. *Faith Works: Lessons from an Activist Preacher* (New York: Random House Pub., 2000), 63.

the city and the people in it. Scripture uses the word “city” over 1,200 times. God has demonstrated his desire for true peace -- *Shalom* -- for the city, and his extension of grace for the people who make up the city. God lives in the city, and works through people to bring about His work and accomplish His plan. According to Bakke, “God lives in community and works in partnerships.”⁷⁸

Professor Villafañe relates three theological perspectives on the city. The first proposed by Jacques Ellul who gives a “Negative View of the City.” Ellul’s view looks at the city as the center of human autonomy, the center and symbol of evil, and the center of idolatry. He would propose that the only hope for the city is the resurrection of Jesus and God’s promise of a New Jerusalem.⁷⁹

The second view is presented by Harvey Cox, who conversely, sees the city in the context of secularization and urbanization in theological perspective. He sees the city as the center of freedom; as the commonwealth of maturity and interdependence; as the center of celebration of change, mobility and open future; as the center of anonymity; and as the center of responsibility.

Yet another view is proposed by Pasquariello, Shriever, and Geyes, who present a Biblical view of the city, and see the city as follows:

1. A gift, as center of a new creation,
2. A place of ministry and mission,
3. An arena of God’s judging activity,
4. An arena of God’s redeeming activity,
5. A symbol of the End-time,
6. A center for pluralism, and as an
7. Expression of Human Responsibility.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ray Bakke. *A Theology as Big as the City*, 34.

⁷⁹ Eldin Villafañe. Class notes, 2001.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Despite the turmoil, hardships and overt evil in the city, there is clearly a special place in the heart of God for the city. Scripture is replete with references to the city, exemplifying God's concern for the city. Dr. Villafañe proposes a "Biblical view of the city." He suggests:

1. A Biblical point of view of the city (theological ambivalence toward human cities),
2. Biblical images contain a realistic assessment of what the city is and what it is supposed to be,
3. All cities are the result of God's common grace,
4. The city's idolatry and oppression calls for God's judgment,
5. Judgment is always tempered with a vision of redemption,
6. God desires peace (Shalom) for the city,
7. God is at work in the city,
8. God loves the city (our final destiny is the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, and the City of Peace).⁸¹

Amidst the various views on a view of the city, several things stand out from Scripture regarding the city:

1. God sees and is concerned about the city,
2. God dwells in the city,
3. God judges the city for its idolatry, oppression, and wickedness,
4. God shows mercy on the city, and
5. God clearly loves the city.

As difficult as it is to minister in the city, this author believes that God has placed a deep love for the city. It is with a deep sense of commitment and calling to urban youth ministry that has led him to living and ministering in the city the past twenty two years. A calling this author feels honored to have been a part of, and one that has brought tremendous rewards and blessings.

⁸¹ Ibid.

A Theology of Peace

One of the themes that is clear in Scripture is the theme of bringing “*Shalom*” or “peace” to the city. It is important to note that the English translation of the Hebrew word *Shalom*, usually translated “peace” or “prosperity,” does not do justice to the full implications of the word. It is a word that is rich in depth and meaning that is lost in most modern translations.

Dr. Villafañe teaches that “*Shalom* speaks of wholeness, justice, welfare – both personal and social. The church is an instrument, a servant, of peace in the city. It preaches and lives the Shalom of God.”⁸²

Theological Concept of Peace

The Bible uses the word “peace” in a variety of contexts and uses. To cite just a few examples: In the New Testament we see “Christ’s peace has come” (Luke 1:79; 2:14); Christ bestowed peace (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50); the believer is filled with the Gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15); Peace is the message of God (Acts 10:36); Peace is an instrument of unity (Eph. 4:3); It is the work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22); and we are told to promote the peace (Hebrews 12:14).

In the Old Testament, there are numerous references to “praying for” and “seeking the peace of” the city. According to Linthicum, “Jeremiah the prophet instructed the Israelites who were in exile in Babylon to, ‘Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile ... (Jer. 29:7).’”⁸³

⁸² Eldin Villafañe. *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 3.

⁸³ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, 86.

Linthicum says “A person’s shalom was synonymous with a good life, for it involved healthful sleep, a long life, prosperity, and a tranquil death after a full life (Gen. 15:1; Lam. 3:17; Ps. 37:11; Job 5:19-26; Lev. 26:6).”⁸⁴

Missiological Categories of the Church’s Mission

The Church’s mission regarding the city is to bring the Gospel of Peace – the message of hope to the city. Dr. Villafañe teaches the great mission of the church as being substantially seen in the manifestation of the following key relevant Biblical terms: *Kerygma* – This speaks of a church that proclaims by word and deed the Good News of peace. It is, as stated in Acts 10:36: “Telling the Good News of Peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of All.”⁸⁵

Villafañe refers to what he calls “Urban *kenosis*” based on Philippians 2: 5-11, that captures the concept of “incarnational ministry.” It incorporates the idea that we become God’s representatives on earth to His people, and demonstrate the Servanthood of Christ.⁸⁶

As the passage develops the concept, we should note the following elements:

1. *Kenosis* – self- emptying (vs. 6-7a),
2. Servanthood demonstrated (vs. 7a),
3. Contextualization (7b-8a),
4. Humility (vs. 8),
5. Obedience (vs. 8b),
6. Sacrificial Service, as demonstrated by Christ on the Cross, and others in the New Testament (vs. 8b),
7. Redemptive (vv. 9-11)⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁵ Villafañe, based on class notes, 2001.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

There are also very clear New Testament models of sacrificial service. Villafañe highlights those models through his examination of Philippians Chapter 2. He highlights the service of:

1. Epaphroditus – 2:25-30 – Sacrifice of “Soma” – body
2. Timothy – 2:19-22 – Sacrifice of Self-interest
3. Paul – 2:17-18 – Sacrifice of self
4. Jesus – 2:5-11 – Supreme Sacrifice ⁸⁸

Koinonnia – Speaks of a church that lives in fellowship and in authentic community; one that has experienced and models for society “the peace that transcends all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). The Bible speaks of this concept of *Koinonia* as exemplified in the New Testament church. In Philippians, Paul speaks of:

- A. Gospel *Koinonia* – Phil. 1:5 – The idea that the Gospel is a “partnership” with others committed to sharing its message,
- B. Grace *Koinonia* – Phil. 1:7 – there is a mutual sharing of God’s grace amongst believers. People need to see the church as a “Beacon of Grace.”
- C. Spirit *Koinonia* – Phil. 2:1 –
- D. Suffering *Koinonia* – Phil. 3:10 – One of the strengths of the church is paradoxically, its powerlessness. In its weakness, it is able to identify with the weak and in its weakness, it is made strong. There is a power and conviction that comes through suffering and pain.
- E. Economic *Koinonia* – Phil. 4: 14-15 – Emphasizes the concept of interdependence. “They gave first to the Lord then to us ...”⁸⁹

Diakonia – Speaks of a church, and of a Christian ministry or service of *Shalom* to a hurting and broken humanity – an agent of Reconciliation, welfare and justice.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Leitourgia – Speaks of a church that confesses, celebrates, and worships the Prince of Peace. Literally: The ministry of attributing worth, honor, praise, and worship to God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit, by all the creatures in diverse ways. Each of the above phrases are important in establishing the significance and vastness of worship. Not just limited to a certain time and place. So the city potentially becomes the place of worship.⁹⁰

A Theology of Prayer

Presence and Prayer of the Church

As mentioned earlier, Jeremiah the prophet said: “Seek the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its peace you will find your peace.” (Jeremiah 29:7). Linthicum believes the message of Jeremiah was not just for that city at that time, but a message for all urban people of God. He teaches that those of us who are in the city are here not just by the circumstances that brought us here, but by God’s providential design. That indeed, He has brought us to the city for specific and deliberate reasons. That God has *called* us to the city.⁹¹

It is not by chance that the people who minister in the city are there. It is very evident that God has called each of them to be there. One can be assured that each believer who is there, has a clear calling and a clear purpose. Christian leaders who are called to the city have a clear call, purpose and a destiny in the city.

This author has had to constantly consider his own call to the city. So often he has thought how nice it would be to move to a plush neighborhood in some American suburb, and perhaps teach or serve in a church in a serene, safe environment. This author has

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, 148.

thought about the fewer hassles he would encounter, and the simplicity of life he could experience and indeed has relished the idea of a more relaxed working context. But to use the words of D. L. Moody, it has been as if this is the work “I am called to do.”⁹²

Indeed, working in an urban context has had its share of blessings and rewards, as well as frustrations and challenges. But this writer’s reason for doing it is a compulsion that he believes can only be attributed to the divine direction and pull of God. As Paul the Apostle declares: “It is the love of Christ that constrains me.” (2 Corinthians 5:14). It is Christ’s love that compels this author to minister in the city.

The Nature of Prayer

The very act of praying is an act of faith, believing that God is at work, and acknowledges our reliance upon Him to move. Karl Barth has said that: “Prayer is an eschatological cry based on acknowledgement of God’s name, will and reign ... it is the actualization of our eschatological reality here and there ...”⁹³ Villafañe shows that prayer can be seen as:

- a. Privilege
- b. Posture
- c. Plan
- d. Petition
- e. Praise⁹⁴

Praying for the City

We are told to pray for the peace of the city (Jer. 29:7), and to “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6). Prayer is an incredibly powerful tool that needs to be utilized in one’s ministry to the city.

⁹² Ibid., 148.

⁹³ Villafañe, based on class notes, 2001.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Based on Psalm 122: 6-9, Linthicum suggests specific things we can and should pray for:

1. Pray for the city's economic health (v. 6)
2. Pray for the safety of the city (v. 7)
3. Pray for political order (v. 7)
4. Pray for the people (vs. 8-9)
5. Pray for importunity⁹⁵

Presence in the City

What are we to do in the city? First and foremost, we are to be God's people in the city. We are to be His representatives – His examples. As the reported cry of one little boy says: “we are to be God with skin on.” The very presence alone of faithful, godly people, living out the faith, and living lives we are called to live, can have a tremendous impact on our city. From the Old Testament perspective, we are called to be a presence in the city (Ps. 137:1-6; Lev. 1:1-2, 9).

From the New Testament perspective, and exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7: we are called to be salt and light. That is symbolic of the types of lives we should live which should stand out as an example to others of a Christ-like lifestyle. We are called to the city. To live, work and be a presence in the city. The presence of godly people is absolutely essential to the survival of a city. Regarding our posture, Linthicum points out that, “not being overtly ‘Christian,’ but just by the consistent, quiet, committed living-out of their faith, the godly people provide for their city both an example and a moderating presence.”⁹⁶

Practice of the Church in the City

What is the role of the church in the city? Our function and purpose in the city does not stop at just being “a presence.” In addition to our responsibility to pray for and

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, 157.

be a presence in the city, we are also called to work in the city. But what exactly are we to do? One important question that arises is: What part, and to what extent is the role of social service in the Christian life and for the minister? Richard Niebuhr declares:

The Christian can exercise his calling to seek the kingdom of God if, motivated by love of neighbor, he carries on his work in the moral communities of family and economic, national, and political life. Indeed “family, private property, personal independence and honor (in obedience to authority)” are goods that are essential to moral health and the formation of character. Only by engagement in civic work for the sake of the common good, by faithfulness in one’s social calling, is it possible to be true to the example of Christ.⁹⁷

This writer believes it is important that the Christian urban minister develop a balance in urban ministry that ministers to the practical social needs of those in the city, along with a strong commitment to teaching Biblical truths and holding people accountable to their relationship with God.

Vocation of the Urban Church

The Church of Jesus Christ has a clear and distinct call as it relates to its role and function in the city. Linthicum speaks of the purpose of the urban church when he states:

The primary responsibility of the church is to enable the systems and structures and the people to see their city from an entirely new perspective, and then help them to act according to that new perspective. People and systems, no longer blinded, can see themselves as children of God and their city as the city of God; they are then able to act consistently on what they see.⁹⁸

Dr. Villafañe suggests that the Church should have the following seven functions:

1. Community of faith: The Church as a model and sign of the Kingdom
2. Communication of a wholistic gospel: An evangelistic and prophetic message.
3. Church planting
4. Charity: Works of love and social services
5. Confronting social structures: Social justice
6. Confession
7. Celebration⁹⁹

⁹⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr. *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 97.

⁹⁸ Linthicum. *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church*, 143.

⁹⁹ Eldin Villafañe, based on class notes, 2001.

Partnership and the Cross

This author fully embraces Villafañe's premise that "the major theme of this Congress on Urban Ministry is partnership."¹⁰⁰ He points out there are various definitions to the word "partnership," but accurately explains that "partnership cannot be understood or practiced if it is not defined and informed by the cross. For it is at the cross of Christ that our personal and congregational self-centeredness is dealt with – thus freeing us up to give ourselves to 'the other,' from whatever culture, class, or color that 'other' may be. The cross frees us up to enter into legitimate and authentic mutuality – true 'Koinonia'!"¹⁰¹

A Paradigm from the Underside

Villafañe asserts that churches which have been operating from a lowly position of oppression, hardships, exemplify the principles of true Koinonia, sharing, and mutual responsibility for one another. It abandons the facades of "having it all togetherness" for a position of authenticity and genuine care. He outlines what he calls the five significant roles of such a church:

1. Salvation: "A liberated and liberating community"
2. Social Service and Social Justice Provider
3. Survival: "A place of Cultural Survival and Affirmation"
4. Secrets of the Reign: "Hermeneutical Advantage of the Poor"
5. Signpost: "A Signpost of Protest, Resistance, and Priestly Presence"¹⁰²

As mentioned earlier, when one views "the city" as a whole, one could succumb to one of two extremes: either a total abandonment of hope, relegating the city as helpless and futile; or a complete embracing and love for the city, believing it to be God's vehicle of salvation and restoration. Villafañe writes: "We neither despair of our city, nor dare we

¹⁰⁰ Eldin Villafañe. *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰² Ibid., 32.

romanticize its possibilities.”¹⁰³ We should be committed to the city despite its shortcomings and difficulties, for the ultimate goal of seeking the Shalom of the city.

This writer is as determined and tenacious in his resolve to minister to the needs of the city and the people in it. He is called to bring hope to the hopeless, salvation to the lost, and love to the unlovable. As Villafaña most aptly put it, “Armed with a ‘burning patience,’ informed by the reality of sin and grace, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can indeed be a witness to and a reality of the splendid city.”¹⁰⁴

Villafaña defines the “burning patience” as “that quality of faith which permits one to live in the ‘now and not yet,’ to live in the tension of the age to come and the present age. It is the quality of faith that gives meaning and strength to our present ministry.” This “burning patience suggests that urban ministry requires time, commitment, fervor – in the biblical idiom, to be ‘filled with spirit’ – for it is a long haul.”¹⁰⁵

America has indeed changed. Over the years, immigration, gentrification and multiculturalism have contributed to the changing face and culture of America. We cannot ignore, deny, or even change that reality. We must embrace it, and we must be intentional and deliberate in our efforts to reach across cultures, identify with them, embrace their identity, get to know them, and strive to bring them hope.

As Villafaña says, “If we are to win ethnic minorities for Christ, we must uphold and affirm their ethnic and cultural identity. Our evangelistic outlook must be permeated by these basic cultural presuppositions.”¹⁰⁶ He surmises those presuppositions as: “(1)

¹⁰³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 50.

the “worthiness” of each ethnic group; (2) the validity of cultural pluralism, and (3) the mediation of one’s religious experience through one’s cultural reality.”¹⁰⁷

Being Relevant Without Compromise

As mentioned in Chapter one, there are two major issues that are of great concern to the urban church today: 1) Young people in urban communities are not attending church as they once did as a part of their upbringing; and 2) those who once attended, are leaving the church in larger quantities than ever before. One of the reasons proposed for this problem is that many churches have not adapted their services and outreach models to be inviting to the next generation. The patterns and styles of worship (in general), do not attract and relate to the newer generation; and further, many are opposed to changing their models for fear of compromising the message, for “accommodation to the culture.”

Although there are some legitimate concerns in that regard, this author feels that our willingness to adapt to the changing culture is having serious and unnecessary implications for the church and its future. There are those who strongly believe that to change *anything* in the “traditional” service is to capitulate to cultural pressure, which would lead to compromise of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and ultimately result in dishonoring God and His Church. To utilize *any* features of contemporary culture¹⁰⁸ would be to give in to cultural pressure, and, as many would say, “would bring worldliness into the church.”

It is this author’s contention that the Bible not only endorses adapting the presentation of the gospel message to be culturally-sensitive, but demands it! Nowhere is

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁸ Specifically, ingredients such as: contemporary worship styles or instruments, changing the liturgy or preaching styles, or eliminating or changing anything they have grown accustomed to as a part of the traditional worship service.

this principle more evident than in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians Chapter 9, Paul was emphatic that the gospel message must take into account, its cultural context. In verses 19-23, Paul says:

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.¹⁰⁹

This is so relevant in understanding our approach to sharing the gospel. Paul is making the point that the reason to the Jew, he "became like a Jew," and to the weak he "became weak," is that "we must become relevant to the group to whom we are trying to reach." This applies to us today as well, but it seems that so few seem to grasp this principle some two thousand years later.

Although Paul was still a Hebrew, he was no longer living according to the law. Yet he understood that in order to earn an audience with the Jews, he had to be sensitive to their culture, and even though he knew he was no longer under the law, he was saying there are times he subjected himself to Jewish law (and culture) in order to reach them. This by no means implies a compromise of the message, but rather a *contextualization* of the message.

In reference to this passage, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck say:

(Paul) was willing to subject himself to the scruples of the Jews (e.g., Acts 21:23-36) in order to gain a hearing for the gospel and **to win** them to Christ. Yet he never compromised the essence of the gospel at the heart of which was salvation

¹⁰⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version.*

by faith, not works (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9) and freedom from legalism (Gal. 2:4-5).¹¹⁰

In a lecture on 1 Corinthians 9, Dr. Neil Skjoldal of Trinity International University's South Florida Campus, says that if we put this in context: Paul was talking about the right to eat meat offered to idols since he was under grace, not law, and the rights of an apostle to take an offering. But Paul emphatically makes the point that he is choosing **not** to use those rights. In Paul's view of Christian freedom and liberty he does not want to impede on other peoples' convictions.¹¹¹

Paul was accused of *theological vacillation*. Skjoldal explains that if anything, Paul is vacillating on *non-essentials* ... not in any areas of essentials of Christian doctrine. He doesn't vacillate on the essentials of the Gospel -- he vacillates on issues of cultural and traditional issues. Paul is not trying to "please" everyone – It is not a capitulation to accommodation for the sake of the Gospel. He is merely trying to find common ground to bring people to the Gospel.¹¹²

Referring to the context of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, George Barna says:

The Apostle Paul, the world's first great itinerant evangelist, provided us with the cornerstone principle, drawn from the example of Jesus' ministry, for effectively communicating the gospel. Paul admonished the believers in the church of Corinth to contextualize the message – that is, to share the gospel with a culture so that it could be understood without compromising or reshaping the work of Christ. The apostle understood that he was called to be a faithful messenger of a timeless message and that the message itself would be relevant to all people in all walks of life, knowing that the manner in which the information was proclaimed might have to shift from one cultural context to another.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Walvoord, John F. Zuck, Roy B. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985), S. 2:524.

¹¹¹ Dr. Neil Skjoldal. *Introduction to New Testament*, lecture, Spring 1999.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ George Barna. *Evangelism that Works* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1995), 26.

Walt Mueller warns that in our efforts to be relevant to the culture and contemporary in our style/format, we must be careful to not become so accommodating to the culture, we violate biblical principles. Mueller points out that this is happening quite often, with noble motives and a solid rationale – it just crosses the line. He quotes from www.ChristianCounterculture.com when he says: “In an effort to be influential (on the culture/society), Christians have been trying to buy their own legitimacy from the surrounding culture by compromising the Christian world and life view.”¹¹⁴

Although the warning is valid, and there is much to consider when contemplating adapting our services and outreaches to be more culturally appealing and sensitive to the next generation, the reality is that many (if not most) urban churches are not implementing serious and radical changes in an effort to be diligent and intentional in reaching the next generation. This paper is dedicated to the message that more needs to be done to be more effective in reaching them ... before it is too late.

¹¹⁴ Walt Mueller. *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 139.

PART 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous chapter addressed the theological framework upon which this research is built. It delved into the Biblical rationale for youth ministry and urban ministry in general, and ministry to *urban* youth specifically. It focused largely on the integration of a theology of urban ministry and youth ministry. It also explored the issue of God's love for the city and the importance of the *Call* to minister to people in the city as one that is dear to the heart of God. The chapter also looked at the importance of ensuring that our ministries are culturally relevant, pointing out that the Bible supports that principle as well; and showing how reaching urban youth must take into account their language, customs, and diversity.

This chapter will highlight some of the resources that were consulted to help gain an understanding of youth ministry in an urban setting, as well as an examination of current resources that introduce us to models of urban youth ministry.

As mentioned earlier, the literature specifically regarding urban youth ministry is sparse. Urban youth ministry educators find themselves constantly having to teach youth leaders to “contextualize the existing resources for your cultural setting.” As Fernando Arzola Jr. laments, “It seems that urban ministers are frequently adapting the material pedagogically, anthropologically, sociologically, and politically.”¹¹⁵ Whereas there is an abundance of literature on *youth* ministry in general; and a plethora of books and resources on *urban* ministry; there is relatively very little written regarding *urban youth* ministry. Even in the literature that does exist and which encompass the broader fields

¹¹⁵ Fernando Arzola, Jr. “Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context.” The Journal of Youth Ministry (5) 1.

mentioned above – very few authors even mention the distinction and specialization of youth ministry and do not devote much if any of their work to youth ministry *in the city*.

It was personally disappointing that of the first number of books this author consulted regarding urban ministry, not one even mentioned much less addressed the issue of youth ministry within the scope of urban ministry. No author dealt with the topic even in a broad, general way, not to mention dedicating a chapter or section to this most significant issue.

This is especially discouraging when we know statistically that over 80% of those who make a profession of faith to Christ do so before the age of eighteen.¹¹⁶ Further, research shows that close to 70% of American youth live in an urban setting, and many of the problems of the city can be directly correlated to influences of youth culture (gangs, drugs, crime, and the like). It is troubling for this author as an urban youth worker who has worked in an urban setting for over twenty years, to know that so few authors – even those writing on Urban Ministry and Youth Ministry, do not include much on the ever growing need of reaching out to youth in the urban setting.

Entire books have been written about restoring hope to urban cities, and developing models of urban ministry, without a single mention of effective ways or models of reaching kids in the city. This is a travesty. Especially during a time when there is such a shortage, indeed a deficiency of role models in the city; when the rate of juvenile delinquency and deviancy are at astronomical rates; and society is struggling to bring solutions to this generation in crisis. Yet so many writers made such little reference to youth ministry and strategies for raising up a generation of young people as a vital component in the restoration of our cities.

¹¹⁶ George Barna. Pastor's Conference, Miami, 1997.

It is recognized that the authors of the urban ministry texts referenced are writing about urban ministry in a general sense, and were not attempting to apply specifics to individual cities, but rather provide an overall theology of the city. However, one would think that youth ministry in the city would be an integral component of *any* urban ministry book, especially when talking about preserving and advancing the ministry of the church throughout the next generations.

This author has heard it said many times that “there isn’t a market for urban youth ministry materials.” This is often times the rationale given as the reason publishers are reluctant to publish relevant materials. However, the reality is, if publishers are using current sales trends of urban materials as a gauge for whether there is a market for urban-specific resources, the numbers are skewed largely, because it is not that the market of buyers is not there; it’s that the publishers are not getting information out to the potential target audience. In general, their databases and marketing tools tend to be directed to a particular cultural market (white, suburban middle-class buyers); and they are not penetrating the urban markets with their advertising. This author has found that there is not a shortage of *consumers*, but the audience does not know where to find the materials.

The need is dire. In this highly advanced, technological savvy world of the 21st century, we have found ways to develop virtually instant ‘anything.’ We have instant coffee, instant cash dispensers (through ATM machines), instant “dinners”; we even have instant information at our fingertips through the Internet, with its ability to find just about any piece of data ... instantly. But no matter how hard we try; and no matter how technologically advanced we become, we will never have “instant leadership.” There is not likely to ever be a day when we take a child from the “hood,” and make them into an

instant leader in mere moments. It will always be a process; it will always take time; and we will always need people investing in youth ... one life at a time. For this to happen effectively, youth leaders must have access to quality training, quality materials, and exposure to effective training resources to help them pursue the goal of reaching the next generation.

The reality is that one day we will *have* to hand over the reigns of leadership to someone who is currently a child; currently a teenager; currently a young adult. Therefore, extreme care, vigilance and tenacity must be taken to develop each young person, and nurture them into the leadership potential they currently possess. For, as this author says in his leadership training seminars: “If we do not develop leaders today, we will not *have* a church of tomorrow.” That leadership will inevitably have to come from someone who is currently young, who will soon grow up. This author cannot think of anything more worthy for authors and publishers to be writing about ... than how to help our young people become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ and committed leaders in their communities. To do this effectively, we must provide training for the next generation of leaders, and there must be adequate materials to do that.

It is amazingly true that many writers omit the whole issue of developing leadership for the next generation, or they give it a terse treatment; almost as a footnote to urban ministry. This author feels it should be screamed at the top of our voices in bold print and 60-pt. fonts: “We must develop urban youth leadership now, before we lose an entire generation of potential leaders!” Unfortunately, most educators, writers and publishers do not seem to share that level of passion. This author must confess it often seems like we are a lonely voice crying out for help in the wilderness.

With that as a backdrop; and in light of the plight of today's youth, this chapter will examine a few of the resources that are available that speak to the issue of urban youth ministry. The following texts will be utilized:

- *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community*, John Fuder, General Editor
- *City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth*, by Scott Larson and Karen Free
- *When Kumbaya is not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry*, by Dean Borgman
- *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation*, by Ralph C. Watkins
- *Prophetic Youth Ministry*, by Fernando Arzola, Jr. (a manuscript currently waiting for publishing)
- *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry*, by Eldin Villafañe, Bruce Jackson, Robert Evans, and Alice Frazer Evans
- *A Prayer for the City: Further Reflections on Urban Ministry*, by Eldin Villafañe

***A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community*¹¹⁷**

A Heart for the City was the only book this author found on general urban ministry that dedicated an entire section to Children and Youth. John Fuder, a professor at Moody Bible Institute, served as general editor, and does an outstanding job of expressing a heart for the city and introducing tools for reaching it effectively. The book is comprehensive and balanced in its focus on urban ministry, and covers a variety of practical and relevant topics, utilizing a number of experienced scholars and practitioners who are well-versed in the ministry dynamics of working in the city.

One thing this current author appreciates about the book is the strong emphasis on training and equipping others with practical tools for working in the city. It is not just a theological treatise, or a sociological book on urban ministry; it is a practical guide on many of the *how to's* of urban ministry as well as a practical manual for *training* others in

¹¹⁷ John Fuder, Gen. Ed. *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999).

the field – both lay and professional leaders. The editor of the book divides the text into parts that deal with themes such as:

- Biblical and Philosophical Foundations
- Education and Training
- Local Church Models
- Ethnic Communities
- Disenfranchised Subcultures, and (in sharp contrast to a number of other books on Urban Ministry), an entire section on:
 - Children and Youth

Fuder draws upon the experience and expertise of a number of well known and respected Urban Practitioners for chapter contributions, including Glen Kehrein (Circle Urban Ministries) “A Case for Wholistic Urban Ministry”; Wayne Gordon (Lawndale Community Church and CCDA¹¹⁸) “A Philosophy of Urban Ministry”; Russ Knight (CURE¹¹⁹) “The Home as Ministry Base”; and Noel Castellanos (CCDA) “Incarnational Ministry in the Latino Community.”

The editor clearly demonstrates a value of the training of others, and included an excellent chapter on “Training College Students for Urban Ministry,” written by Robert Smith, a professor at Moody Bible Institute. Smith states: “If the goal of training is to prepare the college student to *do* and *be* an urban minister, there will be some things that the student will need to *know* if he or she is to be effective in urban ministry.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ CCDA: Christian Community Development Association, an organization committed to developing and strengthening faith-based organizations working to reclaim and restore under-resourced communities, where Wayne Gordon and Noel Castellanos serve as directors.

¹¹⁹ CURE: Chicago Urban Reconciliation Enterprise.

¹²⁰ Robert Smith, “Training College Students for Urban Ministry,” article in John Fuder, *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 127.

Smith places a large emphasis on not just giving students the theory of urban youth ministry, but with also exposing them to youth ministry models; mentoring them through the process; and placing a significant emphasis on involving students in an internship that places them right in the heart of hands-on urban youth ministry. By the end of the training program, it appears as if the students are fully immersed in ministry, and given a clear opportunity for considering if this is where they want to be and what they want to do for the rest of their career. It is a “baptism-by-doing,” philosophy of training students.

In the section dedicated to “Children and Youth,” Fuder includes chapters on: “Reaching a New Generation for Christ,” a sort of “Introduction to Urban Youth Ministry; “Children of Promise,” dedicated to children’s ministry; “Reaching Youth Involved in Gangs,” to address the issue of gangs (exclusively in Chicago); “Kids ... with Kids,” dealing with the issue of Teen Pregnancy; and “The Home as Ministry Base,” speaking to parents of teenagers and the impact they can have on their children.

William Dillon, a long-time urban ministry practitioner and Executive Director of Inner-City Impact, begins the section with inspiring words on how we could dream of seeing leaders in the kids we work with. He points out that Urban Youth Ministry (UYM) is not only about helping the homeless, drug addicts and high school dropouts; UYM is also about raising a generation of future leaders – investing in lives who can then in turn become world changers. And urban youth leaders need to be encouraged and inspired by the work they do in investing in the next generation of potential world leaders!¹²¹

¹²¹ William Dillon, “Reaching a New Generation for Christ,” article in John Fuder, *A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999).

Although this was an excellent resource, marvelously organized and incredibly practical, there were, however, a few disappointments. As grateful as this author was with the inclusion of a section on Children and Youth, those chapters were scant, and seemed incomplete. As a comprehensive book on Urban Ministry, this author feels Fuder did not include enough topics on significant issues related to youth, and was void of solutions and practical applications for youth ministry. The reader is presented with an overview of youth ministry, but relative to the treatment of other topics, youth ministry was almost a footnote.

Again, this author recognizes that this is not a book exclusively about youth ministry, but if one is going to address issues of Children and Youth in a comprehensive book committed to urban ministry, the base of topics should be broader and dealing with more practical issues of reaching young people in the city.

It is curiously conspicuous that significant issues related to urban youth ministry were omitted, especially when one considers the vast extent of nationally known youth ministries in Chicago (and beyond); the wealth of youth ministry experience and knowledge from people like Phil Jackson (Lawndale Community Church and ‘Da House); Ginny Olsen (Professor at North Park University, specializing in Urban Youth Ministry); Gordon McClean (Youth for Christ); just to name a few. To this author, it was unfortunate other prominent urban youth leaders were not utilized for insight, perspective and diversity in its scope.

In addition, although the author was based in Chicago, and the book published by Moody Press; based on the title and intended scope and target audience, it is somewhat disappointing that the editor did not utilize other youth ministry practitioners and teachers

from other parts of the country. Every contributor was based in Chicago. As a Moody professor, Fuder certainly had that prerogative (and perhaps obligation), but it narrowed the perspective and limited the diversity of issues a book of this nature could have covered. It relegated the book to be more of a study of “Greater Chicago Urban Ministry,” rather than, as the title indicates: “Effective Ministries to *the* Urban Community.” It would have enhanced the credibility and broadened the appeal of the book if it had utilized writers from a wider range of cities, experiences, and topics.

Nevertheless, this book is one of the few that, even though not completely dedicated to Urban Youth Ministry, at least gives it serious consideration and provides a good starting point for anyone considering the topic. This author would like to commend the editor for making sure to include an entire section committed to urban youth ministry.

City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth¹²²

Scott Larson and Karen Free, in cooperation with Group Publishers, *dared to tread* where so many authors and publishers have been reluctant to venture: namely, to dedicate an entire book to the essentials of urban youth ministry. Larson utilizes the wisdom and vast experience of a number of veteran youth ministers in the city, and draws upon their individual areas of expertise to develop “Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth.” George Gallup, Jr. begins the book with the Forward and poses some critical questions. He writes:

With a sense of urgency, churches of all denominations need to examine their youth ministries and ask basic questions relating to their missions: Do youth programs have high priority? Are congregations encouraged to move out of their comfort zones and engage in hands-on, face-to-face interaction with youth in need? What outreach programs should we consider?

¹²² Scott Larson and Karen Free. *City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth* (Loveland: Group, 2002), 11.

There is great need to focus with a laser beam on youth in the inner city. The focus of churches, however, should extend to urban youth in general – indeed, to the whole youth population – for the fact is, in many churches youth programs are either faltering or nonexistent.¹²³

Gallup goes on to say that the “future vigor and health of our churches, of Christianity in general, and indeed of society as a whole, depend in considerable measure on what churches are willing to do today to provide a setting that changes young peoples’ lives through knowledge of Jesus Christ.”¹²⁴

Dr. Dean Trulear writes the first chapter, developing a “Philosophy of Urban Youth Ministry.” In it, he addresses:

1. The issue of targeting high-risk youth, pointing out that not too many ministries specifically targets those from the highest-risk areas because they are not adequately trained for such specialization, nor do they typically have the resources needed to be successful in that context.¹²⁵

Trulear laments the reality that most urban youth ministries gravitate towards the kids who are easier to reach. As he points out:

When churches and agencies offer such a general invitation, however, they tend to attract the youth who are already looking for some type of guidance -- or at least a respite from the pressures of life in their communities ... many times, targeting a community’s youth without specifying a strategy that addresses the identification and recruitment of high-risk youth leads to a program that works with the good kids in a bad neighborhood.¹²⁶

2. The need for focused leadership
3. The challenge of capacity building

¹²³ George Gallup, Jr., article in Scott Larson and Karen Free, *City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth* (Loveland: Group, 2002), 11.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁵ Dean Trulear, “Philosophy of Urban Youth Ministry,” article in Scott Larson and Karen Free, *City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth* (Loveland: Group, 2002), 17.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 17.

4. The need for collaboration
5. Building relationships of trust
6. The role of faith¹²⁷

Trulear brings to the forefront that “The difference that caring adults make in the lives of young people has been widely documented through studies of mentoring programs ... all (the programs) share a commitment to mobilizing a significant number of adults to mentor or befriend youth in need of caring adults in their lives.”¹²⁸

In Chapter 2, Efrem Smith deals with “Communicating the Gospel in an Urban Context.” Some principles he addresses: “Be relevant in communication”; “Earn the right to be heard” is a phrase that was popularized by Young Life in the early 1950’s and utilized mostly by other parachurch organizations such as Youth for Christ. It is in fact one of the distinguishing marks of the parachurch, and of those with a more non-traditional approach to youth ministry. It emphasizes the relational and empathic side of youth ministry, versus the more traditional “confrontational” side of evangelism and preaching. As Smith points out, “Earning the right to speak the words of God into the lives of teenagers requires (one) to be willing to enter into their world.”¹²⁹

The principle of “Entering their world” is another distinguishing mark of the parachurch. Once again, the traditional pattern has been to “hold church” (services), and invite the kids to come. The “newer” model is that we must go *out* – go where *they* are – hang out at *their* Malls, go to *their* basketball courts, skateboard parks etc.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 18-21.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹²⁹ Efrem Smith, “Communicating the Gospel in an Urban Context,” article in Scott Larson and Karen Free, *City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth* (Loveland: Group, 2002), 28.

This was a great chapter about relating to young people on their level and in relevant ways. This author feels the chapter should have been more aptly titled: “Relational Youth Ministry,” as the title made it seem like it would have dealt with how to develop an actual talk for kids. The chapter dealt more with *relating* with youth rather than on *communicating* with youth.

Joel Van Dyke, a veteran urban youth minister, wrote on: “Creating Youth Ministries that Crosses Cultures.” Van Dyke lays out some very practical principles that should be implemented by everyone working in, or wanting to work in a multi-cultural context. One principle he develops is to “sit at the feet of other cultures.”¹³⁰ He debunks the common myth that one culture is superior to another, or that our mission is to *change* the minority culture, and supports the thesis that we can all learn from each other. Instead of going into a neighborhood with the attitude that says: “let me show you how to ...” we should approach urban ministry with the attitude: “let me learn about where you are coming from.”

He suggests we take the posture of a student and ask questions, with the genuine desire to learn. He also advocates celebrating differences; not just introducing them to *our* way of doing things, but validating *their* way, and celebrating in the differences. He advocates learning from indigenous leaders who are already there in the community, and being intentional about building relationships, and taking the time to get to know the community.

Scott Larson writes the chapter on “Ministering to Today’s Juvenile Offender.” One of his significant points is the need for caring adults in a young person’s life. Once

¹³⁰ Joel Van Dyke, “Creating Youth Ministries that Crosses Cultures,” article in Scott Larson and Karen Free, *City Lights: Ministry Essentials for Reaching Urban Youth* (Loveland: Group, 2002), 39.

again, traditionally speaking, youth ministry has typically been *program-driven*. But as Larson points out, and this is a basic premise of the book, youth ministry demands a people-centered / incarnational-styled ministry to effectively reach the urban teen.

It is no longer good enough to just have them come out for 1-2 hours per week for a powerful sermon. We must become involved in their lives. As he says: “Healthy adults are absolutely essential for at-risk teenagers to resolve these developmental issues.”¹³¹

Larson is also an advocate of the “youth church” model, where “adults who lead the program come together with teenagers on less threatening ground. Then as relationships develop, and kids grow in their faith and maturity, the transition to the larger church body can more successfully take place.”¹³²

When Kumbaya is not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry¹³³

Dean Borgman sets out to do what few youth ministry books have done: To develop a theology of youth ministry. More than just ideas on youth ministry, or principles for effective youth ministry, or new games and Crowdbreakers for youth ministry, Borgman develops a theology of various aspects of youth ministry, pointing out that people serious about youth ministry need to develop a theological perspective on various aspects of youth ministry. This book goes beyond the platitudinous and tertiary treatment of youth ministry, and delves into the Biblical framework upon which our philosophies should be based. As the title implies, this is more than just “Songs to sing around the campfire.” This is serious theological praxis.

¹³¹ Ibid., 105.

¹³² Ibid., 106.

¹³³ Dean Borgman. *When Kumbaya Is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing. 1997),

Borgman is a big proponent of preaching a gospel that is culturally relevant to the audience we are trying to reach, without compromising the message of the cross. He teaches that in order to be effective youth ministers, we must learn to exegete Scripture as well as to exegete our culture. He says:

To understand the world of youth is to feel the cutting edge of cultural change. Each new kind of music, new genre of movie, new fad, and new advertising pitch is a challenge to those who would understand the beauties and pitfalls of our culture and the ups and downs of adolescent years. To do theology in youth culture forces one to be in touch with the spirit of the age and the trends of the times.¹³⁴

In order to reach the culture effectively, we must understand the culture we are trying to reach; and our models of ministry must reflect an understanding on the culture in order to at least identify with them ... if not totally participate and embrace the cultural trends. Clearly, there are some cultural barriers due to moral and Biblical principles, but Borgman makes the case that we do not do ministry in a cultural, historical or sociological vacuum.

We are a part of this world – and although alienated in one sense – distinct; set apart – in another sense we are in it and need to be familiar with the cultural trends. Borgman points out: “To reach urban, suburban, and rural young people today requires a holistic gospel, relevant for a wide range of human pain and needs.”¹³⁵

Contextualizing Theology

How do we get kids to be interested in the gospel, and to allow us the opportunity to share with them the greatest message on earth? It’s all about relationships. So many people – especially parents, teachers and church leaders – wonder how to relate with this generation of youth? As Borgman succinctly observes,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 16.

To be heard, the Word must come into the world of young people. Presence precedes preaching, and listening precedes speaking. A hundred preachers will fail to break through to those kids over there on the corner. But the street worker who has hung out with them for months may be able to penetrate to the heart of their concerns and gain an audience.¹³⁶

Borgman approaches the concept of Relational Youth Ministry by showing how Jesus hung out with the sinners and was criticized for it (Luke 7:34). As he writes:

Those who truly serve sinners may be similarly condemned, for one cannot genuinely contextualize the Gospel without running risk of being identified with those to whom one ministers. Such a one lives in the tension of a difficult paradox: trying to avoid scandal and the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22) while being a friend to sinners wherever they are found (Luke 19:7); Matthew 1:19).¹³⁷

This is a difficult, but important principle for youth leaders to balance: being friends with sinners, but alienated from the world. How do we tow that fragile line between being distinct and set apart from the world, yet being able to relate with the current generation, and understand, if not totally embrace, their language, music, styles, and other things that make them distinct. Borgman points out:

Theology for youth ministers combines deep insights from the world and the Word, from the streets and the sanctuary, from the behavioral sciences and the teaching of the faith. The challenge relating to human beings in dynamic transition makes one want to understand their changes and to discover with them principles that are appropriate for their world and anchored in eternal truth.¹³⁸

Just as God “became flesh and dwelt amongst us” in the form of Jesus His Son (John 1:14), so too it is essential for the urban youth minister to “enter the world” of the teenager and find ways to relate with them. Borgman continues:

It is the challenge of contextualization coming from the commission of Jesus Christ and the complexity of youth cultures that keep youth ministers talking about getting close to young people and their world. Just as God became the Living Word in human culture, so the Word must today be incarnated or

¹³⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 21.

translated in cultural terms. Revisions of the Bible attempt to keep the Bible culturally up-to-date ... Youth leaders seek new and exciting ways in which to contextualize the Word of God. They will find time to move away from programs, outside the church, to find young people who need to be heard, to be cared for, to find healthy and supportive community. Adventure camping, service learning, and special recovery or support groups are examples of ways we can reach young people where they are and where they hurt.¹³⁹

Cultural and Spiritual Identities

Borgman advocates strongly the need to be culturally sensitive in reaching each generation, and being aware of and relevant to their sub-cultures as well. There is no *one* cultural approach to youth ministry; and no cookie-cutter way to identify with the many sub-cultures of youth. As he puts it:

Youth leaders work with adolescents within their ‘tribal culture.’ By that I mean that their television programs, their music, their fashions, and their slang are meant to distinguish them from adults and adult culture. The elements of this youth culture are as precious to them as the language and rituals, music and dances are to tribal societies. In ministering to those caught in a difficult transition to adulthood, we struggle with the obvious tension between being socially renewed and being spiritually renewed.¹⁴⁰

Borgman expands on the dichotomy of being in the world but not conformed to the world. “Paul was also conscious of his own cultural identity: ‘We are Jews by nature’ (Galatians 2:15, NASB), and ‘I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin’ (Rom. 11:1). Yet he was willing to become Roman, Greek, or barbarian for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:22) without losing his own particular cultural and spiritual identity.”¹⁴¹

One of the most significant aspects of a teenager’s life is their music. With the instant access of free music downloads from the Internet and the introduction of *i-Pods* and other technological gadgets, young people are listening to more and more music

¹³⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 75-76.

throughout their already-cluttered days. It is said that teenagers spend more time listening to music than to their teachers.¹⁴²

There are now so many genres of music, artists of every kind, it is impossible for any one person to keep up with the musical tastes and habits of today's teen. We should, as Borgman urges, still try.¹⁴³ He makes a strong case for why it is essential for youth leaders to become familiar with the music of the day, and in making an effort to understand how and why it is influencing our teens. As he says, "Through their music we not only enter the hearts of young people but can also be introduced into their culture. It is a distinguishing mark of youth culture, a link to their particular group of friends, and a very personal badge of social identity."¹⁴⁴

This is a delicate area for youth leaders, and one fears becoming too extreme to one end of the spectrum or the other. One extreme is to become so accepting of the music, one could be accused of embracing and endorsing it.¹⁴⁵ The other extreme is to ignore it completely or write it all off as "evil" or "sinful" without any examination or critical analysis. Young people will feel rejected and ignored if the latter is the stance we take as adults, leaders or parents.

In contrast, Borgman proposes we take an analytical approach and help young people decipher through their musical choices and critically consider the possible influence upon their lives. As he puts it, "We must find the proper balance of interest, affirmation, questions, and information, in order to sensitively and compassionately

¹⁴² Ibid., 173.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 176.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 181.

¹⁴⁵ Walt Mueller and others refer to this as "accommodation."

broaden their tastes and aid their discrimination regarding music's function in their lives."¹⁴⁶

Overall, Borgman offers keen insights into youth culture, and offers a theological framework upon which to build a youth ministry philosophy and praxis. The book gives careful consideration to both urban and suburban approaches to youth ministry, and Borgman clearly demonstrates a heart for urban young people and is dedicated to providing valuable information and resources for leaders involved in urban youth ministry.

The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation¹⁴⁷

It is not possible to write about Urban Youth Ministry without specifically addressing the issue of the Hip Hop culture. Although it would be a mistake to presume that everyone in an urban population is necessarily of the "Hip Hop" culture, nevertheless, it is still one of the most (if not most) dominant subcultures of urban young people and even beyond. In fact, it has often been postulated that there are more *non-white* young people entrenched in the Hip Hop culture than not.

Interestingly, just prior to submitting this chapter on the literature review, this author became aware of a brand new book on Hip Hop culture by Ralph C. Watkins (editor), and a team of writers who set out to examine the Hip Hop culture and its implications for reaching today's young people.

Watkins in particular, chose to study the movement – not from a mere sociological or academic standpoint – but by immersing himself in the culture and actually becoming a D.J. with all the trappings associated with it. Even as a married

¹⁴⁶ Borgman. *When Kumbaya Is Not Enough*, 183.

¹⁴⁷ Ralph C Watkins. *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2007).

father with teenaged children; and as an academician, researcher and minister, Watkins set out to become a part of this new and developing movement.

Watkins speaks to the issue of the “divide” that has increasingly become bigger in dividing the “churched” from the “unchurched” kids – especially in the African American community – and how much more isolated, alienated and distinct the two have become. The concept (and physical place) of “church” has become foreign to many unchurched kids and is becoming even more so. “It is a divide,” he says:

... that is rooted in class, a divide between the African American church and the larger, working-class African American community. It is a divide that many don’t want to talk about, but is one we cannot ignore. Kids around African American churches don’t feel comfortable or welcomed in those churches. As much as the church has a heart and love for them, we have to be retrained as to how to reach them, affirm them, welcome them, and integrate them and their culture into the church.¹⁴⁸

He speaks of the urgency to reach this culture – utilizing their language – their culture – entering their *world*—in order to reach them effectively ... and before it is too late. “The problem is about the future of the African American Church¹⁴⁹ and the health and wholeness of the African American Community. As we continue to divide ourselves, we only increase the gap, while the community is waiting for the church to have a great coming-out party that brings us together again.”¹⁵⁰

Watkins says what so many in urban youth ministry have thought, but been reluctant to say: “A church that is unwilling to embrace change is a church that will not reach the hip hop generation ... Churches and church leaders that hope to reach the hip hop generation will have to embrace an ethic of biblically based change.” He makes this

¹⁴⁸ Ralph C Watkins. *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation*, 30-31.

¹⁴⁹ I would propose that the problem is not limited to the African American church. The issue Watkins presents is pertinent to churches and cultures across the board.

¹⁵⁰ Watkins. *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation*, 33.

strong assertion boldly and unapologetically. He takes this to such an extent as to say that “if a church is to be true to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, which includes the hip hop nation, it will have to make changes. In the end, the church has to be confronted with its witness as it relates to evangelism and the making of disciples of the hip hop nation.”¹⁵¹

This is the boldest proclamation of this concept this writer has encountered, and he commends the author for his courage. In essence, we are losing an entire generation largely due to the church’s unwillingness and reluctance to make such needed changes, and they have become ill-equipped to relate to this generation.

Watkins is clear to point out that he is not against tradition, and highlights the importance of passing down traditions, teaching traditions and even practicing some traditions in context.¹⁵² But as he emphatically points out, “Some of the African American community’s most loyal denominational churches show signs of death and dying. While they hold on to tradition, they are missing an opportunity to influence the lives of the hip hop generation for Christ. Change means that some traditions must be maintained, but many need to be modified, updated, retired, or funeralized.”¹⁵³

One thing this current writer feels Watkins has neglected to address is the issue of reaching and keeping the current congregants – those who like the current traditions. This writer has found that there are even many young people who prefer traditional church services and styles over contemporary ones or even over hip hop cultural trends. What do we do with them? What do we do with current members of the church who do not

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵² Ibid., 46-47

¹⁵³ Ibid., 47.

identify with hip hop culture? We certainly cannot ignore one subculture in lieu of focusing on reaching another.

Is it the intention to start new churches with a specific target demographic? Or do we merge the two? Is it feasible to have two distinct congregations? These are issues that desperately need to be addressed as church leaders struggle with keeping their current members, but who also want to reach the unreached / unchurched; be it the hip hop generation, the Postmodern generation, the Mosaics, Busters, Boomers, X's or Y's.

As noted by Dr. Alvin Padilla, these are questions that have challenged Christian leaders throughout generations. The questions need to be asked, and attempts must be made to find solutions to today's issues with the understanding that the next generation will wrestle with it again with a whole new set of questions.¹⁵⁴

Prophetic Youth Ministry¹⁵⁵

This author had a unique opportunity to obtain a copy of this unpublished manuscript while it was still in the editing process before publishing.¹⁵⁶ This work was unique in presenting a comprehensive assessment of approaches / models to urban youth ministry as observed in the urban setting. Although somewhat generalized, as an urban youth ministry practitioner, many of these observations seem to be quite common across the urban landscape throughout the country.

Arzola concedes that youth ministry has not become a professional field until relatively recent. Even more particularly *urban* youth ministry has not been considered a

¹⁵⁴ In a conversation with Dr. Alvin Padilla at CUME, in consulting for this thesis (March, 2007).

¹⁵⁵ Fernando Arzola, Jr. Unpublished Manuscript (currently titled): *Prophetic Youth Ministry*, (copyrighted and to be published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove. All rights reserved), 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Note: Since this is from an unpublished manuscript, the page numbers are not consecutive, and begin fresh with each new chapter.

professional career field. His efforts are an attempt to show how this is a worthwhile field of study and career pursuit. He first defines his use of the word “paradigm” by saying:

A paradigm ... integrates both a worldview and a strategy. A paradigm is philosophical and structural. A worldview is a philosophical perspective, and intellectual understanding of something. A model is a structural design, a practical format for doing something. A paradigm combines both a worldview and model; it integrates both theory and praxis.¹⁵⁷

It is interesting, as Arzola puts it, that people often want to know how their youth ministry can be better and grow faster, but they really are not interested in implementing anything too radically different. They basically “believe they need to continue what they are doing – just do it better. Or, they want to continue the same thing in a grander and more organized fashion ... sadly the city is filled with ineffective youth ministries run by wonderful and dedicated Christian people.”¹⁵⁸

One of the important things Arzola points out is that since urban youth are not monolithic, neither are youth ministry models. The models are as diverse as the people and communities they minister in. He categorizes youth ministry models into four broad categories. 1) The traditional Youth Ministry Paradigm, 2) the Liberal Youth Ministry Paradigm 3) the Activist or Social Gospel Youth Ministry Paradigm promotes, and 4) the Prophetic Youth Ministry Paradigm.¹⁵⁹

1. Traditional Youth Ministry Paradigm

Arzola describes the Traditional Youth Ministry model as the most common one seen in the urban context. He says its primary purpose is on “developing a ministry-centered program for urban youth. The primary concern is first, and foremost, the spiritual needs of urban youth ... Programmatically, this is

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., Chap. 1, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., Chap. 1, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Chap. 1, 7.

manifested in Bible studies, worship/liturgical services, Christian Religious Education, Sunday School – all the ‘spiritual’ components of youth ministry”¹⁶⁰

Arzola asserts that each model he presents is represented by a certain style, and he ascribes a particular group of people from the Bible to that style. For the “traditional,” he likens them to the Biblical portrayal of the Pharisees.

Although on initial glance this may appear denigrating and insulting, he is quick to point out that although they have gotten a “bad rap” over the centuries, “the Pharisees were faithful Jews, committed to the teachings of the Torah and struggling to live a life of moral purity – not unlike Biblical Christians today.”¹⁶¹

Although it is easy to understand where Arzola is coming from, and the point he is trying to make, this current writer believes that in light of the stigma of a “Pharisaical attitude,” that it would not be prudent to use the Pharisees as the example of this model. There are two reasons for this: 1) it is too far of a stretch in the analogy / typology to compare current urban youth ministry models to that of an entire religious sect, and 2) the connotations / implications are too potentially offensive / explosive / reactive for the example to be clear. It almost loses its impact. Simply because the incidents where Jesus uses them as an example, or refers to them, is almost always in a negative sense – it is very rarely (or never) in the context of complementing them for being “loyal Jewish adherents to the law.” There is almost never an implied redeeming element to the Pharisees – as far as Jesus’ dealings with them – and thus, this author believes the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Chap. 1, 9.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Chap. 1, 10.

analogy of them as a model of youth ministry is lost. To his credit, Arzola makes a solid case that:

The Traditional Youth Ministry (model) surely believes in the traditions of the Christian faith. However, they are also the most likely to be legalistic, dogmatic, and self-righteous. This, of course, is the irony of hyper-Traditional Youth Ministry – because of its heaviness on laws and rituals instead of grace, it suffocates youth with the very traditions it is trying to promote.¹⁶²

This author agrees with Arzola when he addresses the issue of the harm that is potentially done to the cause of Christ when youth ministries are so legalistic, they are a turnoff for the very kids we are trying to reach. In examining many church youth programs, this author has asked himself, as Arzola rhetorically asks: “How many youth have left the church, once they are able, because of the damage of overbearing Traditionalists?”¹⁶³ It is a valid one, and a question that warrants serious consideration.

2. Liberal Youth Ministry Paradigm

This paradigm is popular with mainline denominational churches, particularly within middle-class and upper middle-class neighborhoods. Its primary purpose is on developing a felt-needs ministry-centered programming for youth. Programmatically, this model will tend to offer inter-relational and intra-relational therapeutic programs. “These programs would include support groups, mentoring, family-based initiatives, inter-generational activities, trips, arts and crafts, and choirs ... The guiding principle for Liberal Youth Ministry is ‘growth.’”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Ibid., Chap. 1, 10.

¹⁶³ Ibid., Chap. 1, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Chap. 1, 11.

Arzola proposes that “At its best, the Liberal Youth Ministry challenges us to address the personal and emotional needs of youth. At its worst, it tends to overemphasize the humanity of Jesus at the expense of the divinity of Christ, who is (the) Son of God.”¹⁶⁵ He states that “The Liberal youth ministry is most exemplified in the Sadducees ... they were sophisticates, highly educated, and generally speaking, the most rational. They were strongly opposed, on the one hand, by the Pharisees, for not being faithful to Jewish teachings and, on the other hand, by the Zealots, for being overly accommodating to Greek culture.”¹⁶⁶

In describing this model, Arzola points out that “Youth who participate in the Liberal Youth Ministry may be taught Scriptures respectfully, but purely metaphorically, devoid of its divinely authoritative significance. Also, the Christian faith is presented as principles for ethical living, instead of Biblical guidelines for living a holy and righteous life pleasing unto God.”¹⁶⁷

On an experiential level, Arzola’s point appears on the surface to be valid. However, without much documentation or research backing, one has to ask themselves: how do we know this? To what can we substantiate these assertions beyond an “informed guess” or casual observation?

3. The Activist Youth Ministry Paradigm

The primary purpose of the Activist Youth Ministry Paradigm, is on developing an urban ministry-centered program for youth. The assumptions of the paradigm begin with *urban issues* affecting youth and then developing

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Chap. 1, 12.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Chap. 1, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Chap. 1, 12.

appropriate youth ministry programs which address these issues or needs.”¹⁶⁸

They are primarily concerned with the social needs of youth. The guiding principle for the Activist Youth Ministry is “justice.” What are the injustices suffered by urban youth? How can justice be actualized for urban youth?¹⁶⁹

Arzola says: “At its best, Activist Youth Ministry challenges us to be engaged in addressing systemic injustice and social sin. At its worst, it seems overly concerned with deconstructing traditions, fighting systems and overturning institutions rather than growing in Christ.”¹⁷⁰

4. The Prophetic Youth Ministry Paradigm

Arzola presents the Prophetic Youth Ministry as “the most effective and holistic paradigm for ministering to urban youth.”¹⁷¹ He characterizes it as the youth ministry paradigm least in operation in the urban context. He says that the primary focus of this ministry is “developing a *Christ-centered ministry* for urban youth.”¹⁷² The assumptions of this paradigm begin with Christ and then developing a ministry for youth.”¹⁷³ Their evaluative question is: “How is Christ growing, deepening and manifesting in the lives of urban youth?”¹⁷⁴ According to Arzola,

This evaluative question shifts entirely the programmatic development of the youth ministry by focusing on Christ and then considering programmatic questions second. The question allows for a more holistic and integrative approach – theoretically and programmatically.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Chap. 1, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Chap. 1, 13

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Chap. 1, 13

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Chap. 1, 15.

¹⁷² One question this undoubtedly raises is: wouldn’t virtually *all* Christian ministries claim that to be true of their purpose and intent?

¹⁷³ Arzola, Chap. 1, 15.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Chap. 1, 15.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Chap. 1, 15.

Arzola presents a solid case for the four paradigms of youth ministry. However, this author is a little uncomfortable with Arzola's choice of the "labeling system." That is, his use of the terms to describe the various distinctions of youth ministry; and the corresponding Biblical designations, for reasons mentioned in the review above.

Although this author agrees with the overall premise and the general characterizations for the youth ministries Arzola describes, this author's concern is that some may take offense to the very fact that he is labeling the ministries, and thus miss the overall point he is making is practical applications that are valid and helpful in understanding youth ministry paradigms.

One question Arzola's work raises pertains to the presuppositions inherent in his youth ministry models. For example, how accurately is he characterizing the groups? Would each group he identifies agree with his assessment of their approach? And subsequently would they be open to his analysis and recommendations for change?

Arzola contends that it is very difficult to "break out of one's paradigmatic box."¹⁷⁶ This author has found that to be so true. It is one thing to bring training to a group of urban youth workers and teach concepts like "Relational Youth Ministry," and "Youth Ministry Outside the Box." It is altogether a different issue to get these youth workers to understand, accept and embrace the principles. And it is still yet another issue for them to implement the principles. This is true for a variety of reasons. Arzola points out that sometimes they have to completely change their worldviews and structures; and sometimes, they may have difficulty convincing the other leaders in the church of the value of the worldview being recommended.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., Chap. 4, 1.

Arzola suggests a few things. First they must be open-minded ... they must be willing to at least examine their current paradigm, and be open to considering a different way of doing ministry.¹⁷⁷ Second, they must think critically about current circumstances and practices. Third, they must honestly evaluate the state and vision of his/her youth ministry. He actually states this truth in exactly the way the author of this thesis has stated in seminars: “Changing one’s paradigm *will* ruffle the feathers of others who want to continue in maintenance mode – ‘this is the way we’ve always done it.’”¹⁷⁸

Finally, and most importantly, says Arzola, the youth workers must be open to the movements of the Holy Spirit. Listen to God’s voice. Where is God through this process? What is God saying? Is God challenging your ministry to become more prophetic?

One thing this author appreciated about this work, is the balanced perspective to youth ministry Arzola brings. He points out the tendencies of the various approaches to youth ministry, and highlights how each one values certain (legitimate) points of view, and shows their strengths and weaknesses. He then draws upon a balance of all the views to point out his thesis of a “Prophetic Youth Ministry” Paradigm. He says:

The youth worker must avoid the heretical tendency of over-emphasizing the human nature (Liberal and Activist Jesus) or the divine nature (Traditional Christ) of the incarnated Jesus Christ at the expense of the other. This can lead to divorcing the biblically orthodox understanding of the Incarnation, potentially leading to relativism, utilitarianism, or humanism, on the one hand, and legalism or moralism, on the other hand.¹⁷⁹

Another balanced perspective Arzola brings to the forefront is that of the actual youth ministry programming. As has been pointed out (and will be expanded on in chapter 5), youth ministries tend to be on one extreme or the other. Either (the traditional)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., Chap. 4, 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Chap. 4, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Chap. 4, 7.

youth ministries will lean towards a more legalistic, Bible-driven program with very little innovation, creativity, and down-right “fun”; or the ministry (more contemporary) will be so fun-orientated, there is very little Bible-teaching, intentional discipleship, and spiritual depth. Arzola points to the danger of youth ministries that try to become “so relevant to youth that they compromise the faith component.”¹⁸⁰

At the same time, as Arzola says, “this does not mean that youth ministries should not speak the language and culture of teens. In fact, if they did not, they would quickly become irrelevant.”¹⁸¹ The key to effect youth ministry, is establishing that balance, and creating a program that is both appealing to the unchurched, whilst still providing opportunities for spiritual growth and depth.

A Prayer for the City: Further Reflections on Urban Ministry¹⁸²

A recent dramatic production in one of Miami’s urban churches was entitled: “There is Hope in Da Hood!” Dr. Villafaña’s work: “A Prayer for the City,” had the hallmark trappings of this moving drama, capturing the essence of the message that stood out: Amidst all the turmoil, corruption and evil that exists in our cities today; despite all the horror stories and painful realities of the city -- the one resounding refrain from is: “There is Hope in Da Hood.”

Those working in the city can often become discouraged, and they need a constant reminder that our work is not in vain, and there is indeed hope. One of those places where the hope is evident is within theological educational circles. Only but a few years ago, there was hardly a *course* on urban ministry. It is encouraging to see theological schools

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁸² Eldin Villafaña. *A Prayer for the City: Further Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Austin: AETH, 2001).

now implement entire departments with full-time faculty committed to the cause of enhancing the educational goals of those working in the city.

Quoting Dr. Bruce Jackson, Villafañe writes: "... While the details may be fuzzy, one thing is clear ... we have an urban future. Like it or not, the world is increasingly found in its cities. As people concerned with leadership development for the church and the city, we believe urban theological education is more of a necessity than ever before"¹⁸³ Indeed, we have a mandate for bringing quality theological training which is *by* and *for* urban practitioners. One that is not just patronizing, and not just "token representative," but one that is truly comprised of trained, credentialed, indigenous leadership, and is academically sound and practical. Villafañe says:

Urban theological education must continually be reminded to humbly express an 'urban *kenosis*.' That is, it must empty itself of the prerogatives of power and prestige, so highly valued by academia and the world; and pitch its tent among the poor and marginalized communities in our cities.¹⁸⁴

Our task in urban theological education is to prepare messengers of the Good News of Peace. "The essence of the Gospel is *shalom* – peace ... the church must be an embodiment and an agent of *shalom*," says Villafañe.¹⁸⁵

Villafañe builds somewhat of a "culture of hope." He speaks to the hope of developing reconciliation and unity amongst various ethnic groups. He refers to it as: "The hope – Reconciliation and Celebration in a 'Latin Jazz' Beat." Villafañe asks: "What are the 'rhythms' needed that can highlight the interplay of individuality and unity of African Americans and Hispanics?" He offers a few suggestions:

1. We must establish lines of *racial discourse*. We must sit together and have truthful dialogue...

¹⁸³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 11.

2. We must identify and develop a '*new cadre*' of leaders in our community. The either/or battle of evangelism vs. social action is passé..." we have got to work together to do both...
3. We must *confess* and *celebrate*. Confession is a prerequisite to celebration ... we must forgive and realize that our fight is not against "white" or "brown" or "black" – but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. 6:12)¹⁸⁶

One of the reasons this theme speaks so markedly to this author, is in the context of his own ministry of providing a "network"; a forum of urban youth leaders to come together for training, fellowship – that *koinonia* Villafañe speaks so clearly of – and encouragement. So many youth workers in the city live by the "Lone Ranger" motif – whether by default (they are just not aware), or by design (perhaps prohibited by their schedule, their pastor, or other limitations). He warns that "The Lone Ranger' mentality of ministry in the city reflects not only poor stewardship of our God-given resources, but a crass and ultimately counterproductive vision of service."¹⁸⁷ Our goal as urban ministry educators, is to provide that *koinonia*, that "solidarity and community," we all so desperately need and yearn for.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 60-61.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 13.

CHAPTER 4: PROJECT DESIGN AND INITIAL “LEARNINGS”

What Helps the Development of an Effective Urban Youth Ministry?

We now turn our attention to the findings from our “learning team” that was assembled to determine the ingredients of an effective youth ministry program in the urban setting. This chapter will also seek to show how these ingredients are essential in a training program for youth leaders and analyze the effectiveness of churches in considering and implementing these essentials as perceived by the leaders.

In his work of the paradigm of “hermeneutical circle of social ethics,” Professor Eldin Villafañe categorizes the social ethic process into three steps: 1) *Clarification*, 2) *Conceptualization*, and 3) *Confrontation*. In each he directs the practitioner to answer each of the following questions: 1) *Clarification*: What is the nature of the issue? What is its context? What are the major positions defining and analyzing the issue? 2) *Conceptualization*: What are the biblical and theological bases for a Christian response to the issue? And 3) *Confrontation*: In what ways can the Christian and the Church respond concretely to the issue?¹⁸⁸

Regarding social analysis, Villafañe says: “Social analysis is the instrument or tool we use to clear away the lies, the blindness, the confusion, and the propaganda, so that faith can discern the movement of the spirit, and indeed the forces of evil in our world today.”¹⁸⁹ It is the process by which we determine if something in our life, world, or in our ministries is effective, needs evaluation, needs adjustment, or even needs an overhaul. Through analysis, critical reflection, brainstorming sessions, prayerful reflection, or any other means at our disposal, it is important that we periodically take a

¹⁸⁸ Villafañe, Eldin. From class notes, June 2002.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

fresh look at our ministry models, and assess their current effectiveness and consider alternative approaches to what we do. This chapter will utilize Systems Thinking to analyze current youth ministry needs, with a view of developing an effective training model for others.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is a revolutionary way for organizations to self-examine their model and approach of how they do things on a continuing basis. It looks at issues with a holistic mindset – looking at issues from the perspective of the “big picture,” with a view of how the organization can grow. It invites the participation of its members into a process of thinking through how the organization works and strategize on how to improve the organization and its services.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge describes five disciplines of Systems Thinking: Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision, Team Learning and Systems Thinking. According to Senge,

Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’ ... It is also a set of specific tools and techniques, originating in two threads: in ‘feedback’ concepts of cybernetics and in ‘servo-mechanism’ engineering theory dating back to the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁰

As Senge points out, “The practice of systems thinking starts with understanding a simple concept called ‘feedback’ that shows how actions can reinforce or counteract (balance) each other ... Ultimately it simplifies life by helping us see the deeper patterns lying behind the events and the details.”¹⁹¹ Systems thinking enables one to really see the relevant causal factors at work in shaping an organization’s life. It takes a step back, and

¹⁹⁰ Peter Senge. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1994), 68.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 73.

allows the organization to see itself in the context of all its parts working together in a cohesive capacity. The following is a brief summary of the five disciplines capturing the heart of Systems Thinking:

Personal Mastery

The first of the disciplines is Personal Mastery. Senge describes this as “the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively.”¹⁹² It is the discipline of personal growth and learning, which is beyond acquiring competences and skills to embracing a posture of approaching one’s life as a creative work, living from a creative as opposed to a reactive viewpoint.

Senge points out that personal mastery is not something that you possess. It *is* process. He says: “People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that ‘*the journey is the reward.*’”¹⁹³

Mental Models

Mental Models are the general perceptions of how we view the world. It is the *grid* or *lens* we bring to the table. According to Senge:

The discipline of working with mental models starts with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. It also includes the ability to carry on ‘learningful’ conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid., 7.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 142 (Italics mine).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 9.

Senge cites Hanover's CEO Bill O'Brien, who states "... The healthy corporations will be ones which can systematize ways to bring people together to develop the best possible mental models for facing any situations at hand."¹⁹⁵

Shared Vision

It is common today for people -- in both secular and religious circles -- to talk about "owning a personal vision." Many organizations encourage their staff/employees to develop their own personal vision statements. This author has all too often witnessed the consequence of individuals not *owning their own vision*. As Senge aptly describes it:

If people don't have their own vision, all they can do is 'sign up' for someone else's. The result is compliance, never commitment. On the other hand, people with a strong sense of personal direction can join together to create a powerful synergy toward what (we) truly want.¹⁹⁶

Senge presents the importance of having *Shared Visions*. He says that Shared Visions emerge from personal visions. "When people truly share a vision they are connected, bound together by a common aspiration. Personal visions derive their power from an individual's deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring."¹⁹⁷

Team Learning

One of the most significant and distinct characteristics of Systems Thinking is the concept that organizations need to exemplify being a *Learning Community*. They subscribe to the belief that instead of being dictatorial and autonomous in its operation, it is to the advantage to the organization that it is a learning community, where each person contributes to the learning process and thus the growth of the organization.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 181.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 211.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 206.

They move together (“alignment”), to form a harmonious group which leads to the “synergy” of the organization. Everything works in tandem for the overall benefit of the organization, and ultimately its growth. The discipline of team learning starts with “dialogue”; the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine “thinking together.”

According to Senge:

To the Greeks dia-logos meant a free-flowing of meaning through a group. Allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually ... The discipline of dialogue also involves learning how to recognize the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning. The patterns of defensiveness are often deeply ingrained in how a team operates. If unrecognized, they undermine learning. If recognized and surfaced creatively, they can actually accelerate learning.¹⁹⁸

Senge cites Bohn who identifies three basic conditions for dialogue as follows:

1. All participants must ‘suspend’ their assumptions, literally to hold them, ‘as if suspended before us;
2. All participants must regard one another as colleagues;
3. There must be a ‘facilitator’ who ‘holds the context of dialogue’¹⁹⁹

Urban Youth Ministry and Systems Analysis

Without intending to generalize, this author believes it is fair to point out that *most* urban churches do not have full-time youth pastors nor to they, in general have a distinct philosophies of youth evangelism or paradigms of effective youth ministry models. The general way many urban youth leaders function is that the pastor basically conveys the vision to the designated (volunteer) youth leader who in turn implements the ministry structure which is most often based on a traditional model of ministry.

Thus, systems thinking would be a radical approach to evaluating and implementing a youth ministry model based on the input of not just the leaders of *that*

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 10

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 243.

church, and not just leaders in general, but also with the input of youth leaders from various churches. With a systems thinking approach, the church would need to be open to fostering ideas from individuals from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and points of references, but whom all share similar and distinct commonalities – namely, that they are reaching young people for Christ who are in predominantly urban areas. This systems approach would utilize the input of a number of youth leaders who share a very similar target audience, and many distinct characteristics of the urban church.

One of the problems commonly observed in the urban setting, is that people are applying solutions that are not only out-dated and traditional, but that are in reality ... not working. And this is all done with the sentiment of: “well, that’s the way it’s always been done.”

For some, the issue is that they are not aware of another way; and for others, it is a resistance to change, even when introduced to other and newer models, for fear that we are “secularizing the Gospel”, or succumbing to “worldly methodologies.”

What we need to come to terms with as a church is that clearly, what we have been doing is not working, or not working as effectively as it once did. As we mentioned in chapter 1, the status quo might be sufficient in keeping a few “churched” kids and strong Christian young people consistent, but it is certainly not working in attracting “*new hearers*”, and is not very effective in keeping *nominal* kids or *fringe* kids around for the long-term.

The premise of this research (as outlined in chapter 1), is that we must do things that will redeem the time, and indeed reach out to *new-hearers* of the Gospel. We must

recognize that we are in a critical era, and we must do it now before we continue to lose young people at an exponential rate.

This author's concern is that we are rapidly approaching (if not already reached) a crisis in the church, where fewer and fewer people are making it back to the church as adults, and we are running the risk of losing generations of people from the church completely. This massive loss could be realized even within the present or next generation. If this is allowed to happen without addressing it, we could find ourselves with empty churches and no one there to receive the baton.

To the Systems Thinking practitioners, it is far too common for organizations to wait until a problem is dire and sometimes irreversible before implementing changes that are significant enough and timely enough to make a difference. It is the hope that through this research, a strong case can be made for why we need to use Systems Thinking to design a new approach, and to help the church develop a sense of urgency for becoming more open to, and developing a new direction for urban youth ministry models that exist.

Systemic Analysis of Effective Urban Youth Ministry Programs

The Hexagon Process

The author sent out letters to twenty-five youth workers in the South Florida area, inviting them to participate in this research project. A total of nine workers responded to the letter, and were invited to participate in the Hexagon process. This group would become our "Learning Community." The individuals were from a variety of ministry contexts, including parachurch organizations and churches encompassing a number of denominations. There were seven males and two females. The group consisted of 4

Hispanics and 5 Blacks (2 of Jamaican heritage, 2 of Haitian heritage, and 1 African American).

Five of the participants were from a more traditional church setting, and four were involved in a more “contemporary” ministry context. It was important for this process, to have people who practice youth ministry based on their tradition and background, as well as some who were more “progressive” or “contemporary” in their approach.

The author informed the participants on the process and procedure of Hexagoning, and told them of the guidelines: The participants were told that they must ‘suspend’ their assumptions; literally to hold them, ‘as if suspended before us’; and that all participants must regard one another as colleagues. It was explained that we hoped that through this process, we could take a fresh look at current youth ministry models – including their own -- and have an objective view of our ideal scenarios, and not pre-conceived ideas mostly based on our traditional models; or to settle for doing ministry the way they did because “that’s the way it has always been done.” The issue at hand was: *If you could dream of the ideal youth ministry, what would it look like?*

We posed the question that would launch the systemic process of looking at effective youth ministry models as it applied to urban communities / churches. Drawing on Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline*, the author posed the question: **“What hinders or helps the development of an effective urban youth ministry?”**

The participants were asked to write down three responses to the posed question. Each person was asked to give a one statement answer as we called for responses around the room. We did this for several rounds. Each response was written down on large sticky note pads (Hexagons) and taped to the wall so everyone could see.

Each response was taken seriously, and the list was only pruned, (i.e., edited) for duplicates and comments that were closely related. Many responses spurred further dialogue for enhancement and/or clarity; and there were many nods and *grunts* of affirmations and disapproval respectively.

We recorded strengths and weaknesses separately, and then began the process of listing the responses according to categories or groupings. The group was fully engaged in the dialogue, using the hexagon process to register their answers. We then put the categories in the order we thought would form the positive loop. The author's overall purpose was to discover what youth leaders saw as the most essential ingredients necessary for an effective youth ministry in the urban setting. The question was posed:

Question 1: What helps the development of an effective urban youth ministry?

Responses to question 1: "what helps ..." were as follows:

Helps

1. Trained volunteers
2. Consistent Leadership
3. Bilingual services
4. Adequate transportation
5. Empowered youth leadership
6. Congregation with a vision
7. Personal brokenness among youth
8. Leaders who understand youth culture
9. Knowing your limits as a leader
10. Sacrificial leadership
11. Funds
12. Sports outreach
13. Ministry outreach in the arts
14. Mentoring program
15. Tutoring outreach program
16. After-school ministry
17. Block parties
18. Bible Clubs
19. Camps
20. Games
21. Special annual events

- 22. Youth Leaders Network**
- 23. Promotion of Family values**

Each statement was put on large Hexagon cards and placed on the wall. The Learning Group was then asked to put them in categories. The order of the positive groupings were:

Groupings:

A. Developing A Strong Leadership Team

- 1 – Trained volunteers**
- 2 – Consistent leadership**
- 5 – Empowered youth leadership**
- 8 – Leaders who understand youth culture**
- 9 – Knowing your limits as a leader**
- 10 – Sacrificial leadership**

B. Obtaining Resources Necessary for Ministry

- 4 – Adequate transportation**
- 11 – Funds**
- 22 – Youth Leaders Network**

C. Assessing / Increasing Spirituality of Young People

- 7 -- Personal brokenness among youth**

D. Providing Church and Parental Support

- 6 – Congregation with a vision**
- 23 – Promotion of Family values**

E. Implementing a Plan for Outreach Programs

- 3 – Bilingual services**
- 12 -- Sports Outreach**
- 13 – Ministry Arts**
- 14 -- Mentoring**
- 15 – Tutoring**
- 16 – After-school ministry**
- 17 – Block parties**
- 18 – Bible Clubs**
- 19 – Camps**
- 20 – Games**
- 21 – Special annual events**

Determining the Positive Loop

The next step was to put the groups in an order that the group felt, as Senge puts it, “told the story.”²⁰⁰ The group recommended that the strengthening loop should be grouped as: **DABEC: Church and Parental Support → Strong Leadership Team → Obtaining Resources → A Plan for Outreach → Increased Spirituality of kids**

It was felt that the most essential ingredient of an effective youth ministry was that it needed to be established on the foundation of solid support by the church – both leaders and parents. The group agreed that whatever youth ministry model one used, if it was not supported by the key leaders of the church and by parents, the youth ministry would not be able to grow effectively.

In addition, if the youth leaders did not know they had the support of the leaders, their ministry would always be hampered. Although many would say this does not translate as a specific “youth ministry model,” still the dominant thought was that a ministry could not go anywhere unless it had the support of the church and parents.

It was then felt that with the Church and parental support, the next ingredient was: Strong Leadership. Although the issue of leadership is broad, the team clarified that they intended the term “leadership” to be the “Youth Committee.” That is, those responsible for the vision, direction and program implementation in a youth ministry. This would most often be comprised of adult leaders, but some youth committees would incorporate student leaders as well.

It was then expressed that once the church leadership and youth leadership were on the same page, that the next step was to ensure that youth leaders has the necessary resources for their ministry. This included materials (e.g. curriculum), facilities, financial,

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 76.

and human resources. It was felt that many (probably most) youth ministries are under-resourced, and are not given the attention warranted by the task at hand.

It was discussed that many church leaders are not recognizing the urgency of investing in youth ministry, and all too often it is not given the attention needed. Some felt strongly that this item should've been listed first, but as we went around, we concluded that if a group did not have strong support and strong leadership, it would not be granted resources for the ministry.

The next category was *Outreach Programs*. It was felt that once the support, leadership and resources were in place, then a program could be implemented with the proper resources behind it.

The group as a whole struggled with this category because it was so multi-faceted. There were so many ingredients being listed for effective youth ministry programming, each one almost warranted its own category. But what we realized was that specific programming would be dependent upon varying dynamics. For example: the demographics of the particular youth ministry; the spiritual maturity (or lack of it) of the group; and the specific needs of the community (e.g. educational, employment, job skills, and economics). These variables would determine what ingredients were necessary for an effective youth ministry at a particular location. The basic principle is that every effective youth ministry needs to have strategic outreach programs that are relevant to the specific group of youth being targeted, and that meet the needs of the community.

As participants listed the various ingredients for the actual program, it was clear that everyone was coming from a different perspective that was relevant to where they

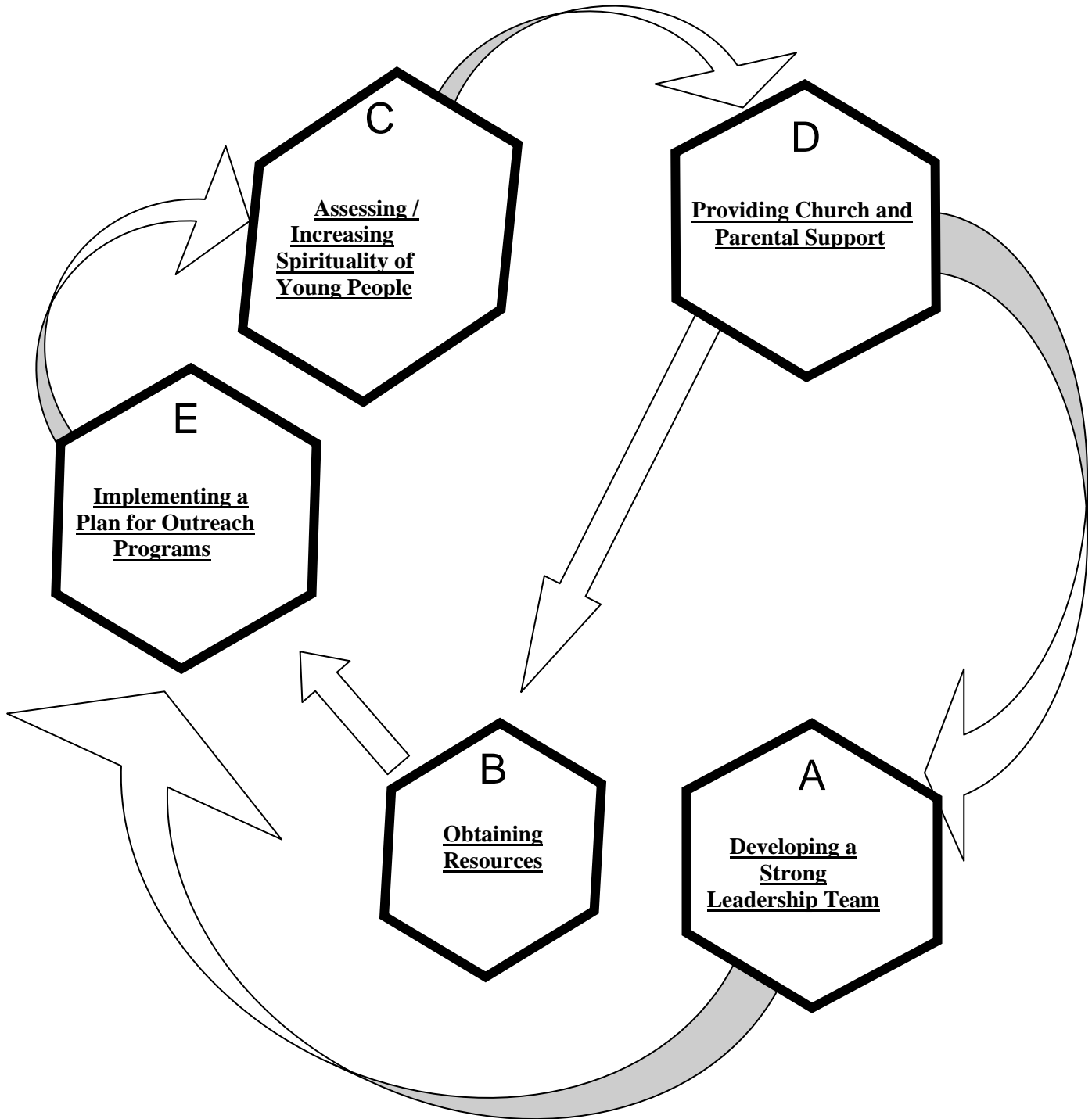
were at. If there is one thing that was abundantly clear, it was that there is no *one* model of programming, but a multiplicity of necessary ingredients.

The final category was *Spiritual Maturity*. This category was a little unclear, and surprising that there was not more direct input from the learning team. But based on further discussion, it was well agreed that this was indeed an important category, and the lack of input by no means signified otherwise. It was agreed that the ultimate objective of any youth program should be evangelism and the spiritual maturity of young people. It was also unanimously agreed that every program should have as its ultimate goal “to see young people become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.”

Upon further discussion on this issue, the group asserted that Spiritual maturity included discipling young people, training them for leadership positions, and involving them in actual ministry responsibilities. It was felt that this would lay the spiritual foundation for young people, which would presumably or inevitably lead those young people to become leaders as young adults throughout college, and eventually into their adult / professional lives.

This would result in them becoming contributing members of society, involved in their church, and (hopefully) leading them back to becoming leaders in the church and in return become one of the decision-makers for the next generation of leaders. The causal loop would look like Table 1:

Table 1
Causal Loop



The Learning Team then answered question 2: **What Hinders the development of an effective urban youth ministry?**

Answers to question 2:

Hinders

1. Traditionalism
2. Lack of parental involvement
3. Poor parental examples
4. Family values
5. Limited ministry to parents
6. Churches unwilling to work with unchurched kids
7. Lack of spiritual application on part of the kids
8. Lack of vision from leadership
9. Lack of proper planning
10. Lack of relational ministry
11. Limited staff/lack of volunteers
12. Compromised leadership
13. Lack of ownership of ministry by kids
14. Leaders not willing to adjust
15. Churches unwilling to designate a youth budget
16. Lack of resources
17. Coping with overwhelming needs
18. Churches unwilling to work with unchurched kids
19. Spiritual apathy
20. Lack of compassion by kids

The Hindrances were grouped as follows:

Groupings

A. Weak Leadership from the Youth Leaders

- 8 -- Lack of vision from leadership
- 11 -- Limited staff/lack of volunteers
- 14 -- Leaders not willing to adjust
- 12 -- Compromised leadership
- 17 -- Coping with overwhelming needs

B. Lack of Support from the Church

- 1 -- Traditionalism
- 6 -- Churches unwilling to work with unchurched kids

- 15 -- Churches unwilling to designate a youth budget
- 16 -- Lack of resources

C. Participation and Support from Parents

- 2 -- Lack of parental involvement
- 3 -- Poor parental examples
- 4 -- Family values
- 5 -- Limited ministry to parents

D. Student Leadership/Spirituality

- 7-- Lack of spiritual application on part of the kids
- 13 -- Lack of ownership of ministry by kids
- 19 -- Spiritual apathy
- 20 -- Lack of compassion of kids

E. Lack of Effective Outreach Programs

- 9 -- Lack of proper planning
- 10 -- Lack of relational ministry
- 18 -- Churches unwilling to work with unchurched kids

The next phase of our group was to put the hindrance categories in an order that they felt “told the story.” The following order was recommended for the negative loop:

BADCE:

As with the strengths, it was felt that the negative loop needed to begin with *Church Support*. It was felt that the most difficult thing for youth leaders to face is the discouragement that comes from church leadership. It was unanimously agreed that youth leaders did not feel they had the support they needed, and that it is essential for an effective youth ministry.

The second ingredient is *Effective Leadership* from the leaders within the youth committee. If the leaders were not on the same page, the ministry could not move ahead.

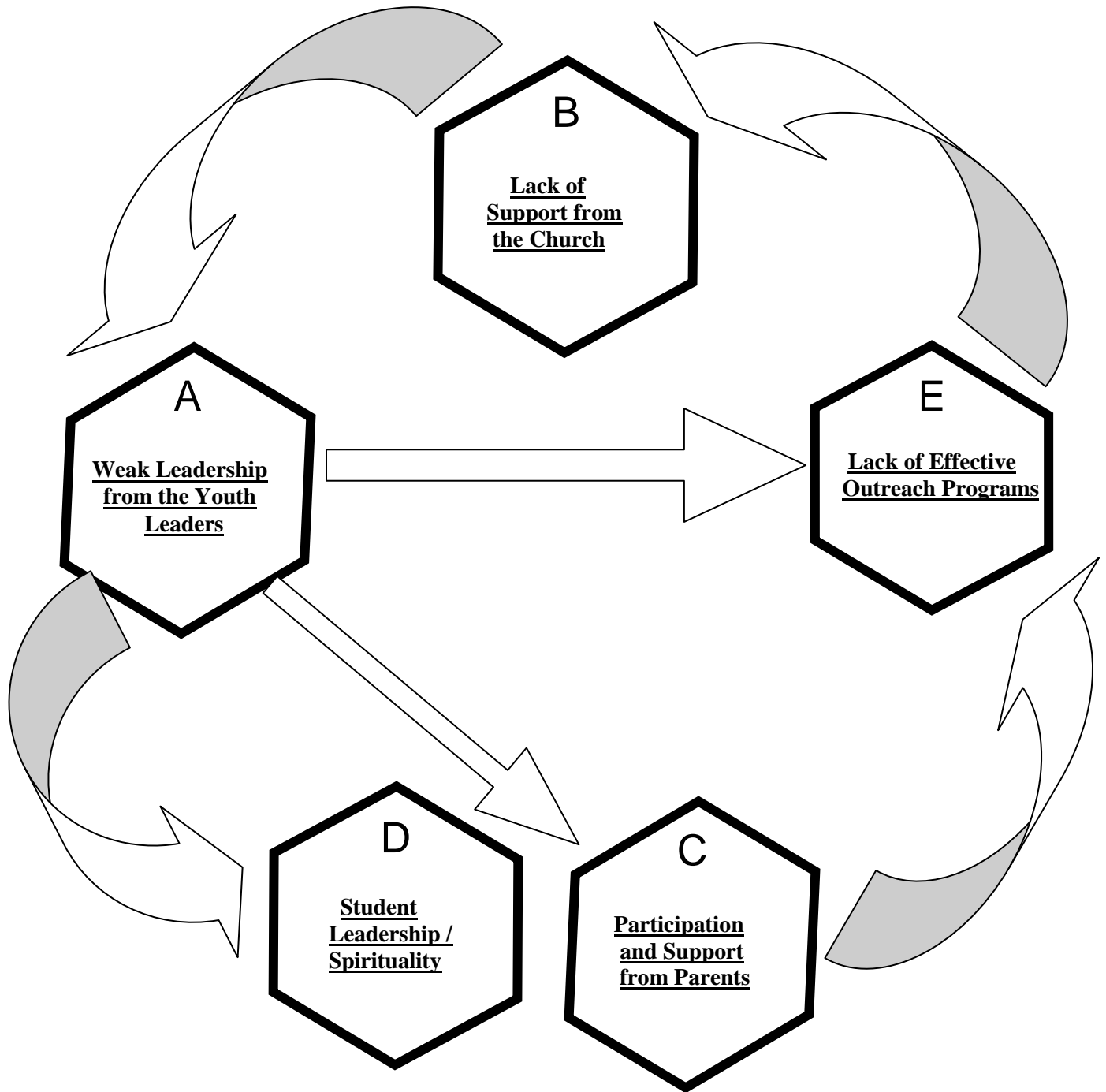
This would result in the students not being served effectively, leading to the lack of maturity amongst the students. It stands to reason that if the leaders are not cooperating

with a focused program, then the students are less likely to respond, resulting in them not developing spiritual maturity.

If students were not responding and growing, it was felt that this would lead to parents not being pleased and ultimately not being supportive of the program in general. It was discussed that having students who were participating and growing had a direct correlation with how parents viewed and subsequently supported the program. Consequently, this would reflect back on the program itself which would not function effectively, resulting in the lack of good, balanced and healthy youth programming.

The negative loop would look like Table II below:

Table II
Negative Loop



Hexagon Analysis

Looking at our hexagon, it is evident, that overwhelmingly, the consensus was that the most important aspect of effective urban youth ministry was leadership. It was unanimous that everyone present agreed that without effective leadership, no program would succeed.

It was also agreed that the number one place to start was with Church support. Without the support of one's church, there is no way one could advance in youth ministry. Youth leaders expressed frustration that they did not feel their churches supported what they did. One overlying sentiment was shared by many on the Learning Team, was that unfortunately, youth leaders are all too often regarded as "glorified babysitters."

Clearly, no one would say that, but it is often evident in the way youth leaders are treated, and evident in the lack of support they receive from the church in general. It is not uncommon for urban youth leaders to feel that people are placed – more like stuck – into youth ministry positions because of a lack of anyone else willing to do it. That is a sad and unfortunate reality felt by too many youth leaders.

The causal loop distinctly shows that an effective youth ministry needs to be built on the foundation of strong leadership, giving rise to essential resources, leading to effective programming, and ultimately resulting in students coming to Christ and becoming spiritually mature.

In contrast, the negative loop shows that if a youth leader does not get the church support needed, that will lead to a diminished leadership team and the loss of parents and

student leaders, which will reflect in the decline of the program, and consequently the further loss of church support.

Further, weak leadership on the part of the youth leaders would directly affect the ability to run effective outreach programs. It stands to reason that if there is not a competent, well trained team of leaders, it is not possible to have outreach programs that are well planned and well executed.

Conclusion

As Leadership expert John Maxwell teaches: “Everything rises or falls on leadership.” There seems to be a huge leadership vacuum in many of our church youth ministries, and it is affecting the effectiveness of the church’s ability to reach the next generation. Something must be done to stem the tide of this rapid decline of leadership development.

As this depiction of effective ingredients for youth ministry began to emerge, this author could not help but see his own positive childhood youth ministry experience reflected in the causal loop; and later in his experience as a youth leader. As a youth, he was involved in an incredible youth ministry that was (and continues to be) 20-30 years ahead of its time. This was true to such an extent; many of the current leaders of that (once) small church in the Island of Jamaica are products of that youth ministry 25 years ago. It has been a reaffirming experience to know that many of those young people who served as student leaders in their teens, are now senior leaders and officers of the church today!

Although this author was only involved as a student leader at the time, it was evident that they had strong church and parental support; exemplified a solid leadership

team; had the resources they needed for effective ministry; developed a solid plan for outreach; and had an effective program for discipling the young people into spiritual maturity. The youth leaders obviously had the backing of the church leadership, and were allowed to implement models of ministry that were far ahead of it's time in the 1970's – models that even today would not be accepted in many traditional churches.

That church has grown from about 100 people in average weekly attendance, to its current weekly attendance of over 1,000 people. It's hard for this author to conceive, but the current Senior Pastor and Youth Pastor were in youth group with him, as well as many of the deacons, elders and ministry directors. There is a definite positive correlation between the ministry model implemented in that era and the positive results over the last 30 years. A model that even to this day is rarely used, especially in the traditional American urban church.

Subsequently, this author – without deliberate intentions – implemented a similar model; now as an adult, through his ministry with Miami Youth for Christ – initially as a Chaplain with the Dade County Juvenile Detention Center – and later as an Area Director in one of Miami's urban communities. Unbeknownst to him at the time, this model was radically different than the average church model in the United States, and most definitely different to most urban churches he later encountered. This became the basis on which he developed a burden for the urban church, and saw that many were outdated in their approach to youth ministry, and missing opportunities of reaching the next generation with the Gospel.

It is believed that the above Hexagon indicates that: with proper church support, a group can develop effective leadership, which will lead to the provision of resources, and

will facilitate the development of outreach programs, leading to the spiritual maturity of students (and indirectly their involvement in the church) which would inevitably result in more church support. This should be the goal of every urban church, and serves as the impetus of this study and the passion of this author.

This chapter has sought to examine from a Systems Thinking perspective, what youth leaders believe are the essential ingredients for an effective urban youth ministry. In chapter 5 we will examine some of these program dynamics specifically, and look at how others are addressing those issues; with a focus on how organizations are preparing youth leaders to work in an urban setting. We will take a look at a few current models of youth ministry, and youth ministry training programs, to determine how best to meet the needs of youth workers in the city.

PART 3: CONFRONTATION

CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES/IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY

DEVELOPMENT

It was over twenty-one years ago when this author was handed the keys to an old van, a list of 15 kids from one of Miami's most crime-ridden communities, and given the assignment: "Your mission -- should you choose to accept it -- is to rehabilitate those troubled kids on the list." He had just accepted the position as an Area Director for Miami Youth for Christ, and at that moment he began to doubt his call to inner-city youth ministry.

With Bible-in-hand, three very dedicated volunteers, and few resources, he set out to reach these kids for Christ. He felt alone, unprepared, and isolated from the rest of the Christian world. What does one do? Where does one start? How does one get trained and equipped for such a ministry? This was the struggle of this urban ministry "freshman" in the "University of the Hood."²⁰¹

This paper has called attention to the fact that many urban youth leaders are not trained and equipped with effective models of ministry, nor are they given the tools or resources they need to implement such models. In general, as we have pointed out, youth leaders are not aware of contemporary models of ministry, or are not able or allowed (in some cases) to implement them.

In Chapter 2, this paper presented a Biblical case for being relevant without compromising the message, and cited 1 Corinthians 9 as a foundation for the Biblical basis for being relevant to each generation and culture. A Biblical rationale was given for

²⁰¹ A term adopted from John Fuder in: *A Heart for the City*.

the church to be relevant to their culture, contemporary in their approach, and innovative in their methodology. That key passage, which deals with being culturally relevant, is a key passage in understanding and giving youth leaders Biblical “permission” to be contemporary and innovative in their approach to youth ministry.

This chapter will focus on developing a strategy for implementing a training model for urban youth leaders. Beginning with the underlying premise of this paper that the urban church must consider a major overhaul of its approach to youth ministry, it will examine three main things:

1. What are some of the current paradigms and models of youth ministry,
2. What training programs exist to train youth leaders, and
3. What an effective training program should look like – ingredients to an effective training program.

This chapter will seek to explore those ways, and present models of a few organizations that are committed to training leaders on these principles for effective ministry.

Reaching This Generation for Christ

Why the Church Must Consider Serious Changes

As has been emphasized in previous chapters, the church must consider serious changes in order to remain relevant and effective to the next generation. This chapter will link the connection between the importance of church support, developing an effective leadership team, obtaining resources, a plan for outreach, and ultimately the spiritual development of young people, as borne out in the research phase of this thesis.

Some of the key questions we must seek answers to are: What will attract teenagers to the church? What do young people look for in a church today? And what will they look for in a church in the future? Is the urban church prepared, and are they preparing themselves for the constant and inevitable changes. How does the church and training organizations prepare youth leaders to reach kids?

First, it is important to note that these questions do not place social needs or felt needs over Scripture. The real question relates to identifying with the culture for the sake of the gospel without losing the essence of that gospel. And for this, Scripture does not need to be violated to rationalize a program geared for the younger generation; but in fact, as pointed out in chapter 4 (based on our examination of 1 Corinthians 9); Scripture itself legitimizes those questions. In his doctoral thesis on Evangelism and Postmodern Youth, Dr. Roger Felipe writes:

One of the aspects that attracted people to the early church was its social services (Acts 6). The early church met the needs of the poor by selling their properties (Acts 2; 4). Women were attracted to the church because of the equality of the Gospel message and slaves gravitated to the freedom offered in Christ (Galatians 3:28). The truths and spirit of the Gospel were contextualized to meet people at their point of need and engage them with God's words of hope and forgiveness.²⁰²

It has been said that the one thing in life that remains constant ... is change. And truly, the culture has changed throughout generations, and will continue to do so. The church must keep up with those changes in society in order to stay relevant to the cultures and generations they are trying to reach.

Although, the Parachurch does a good job of reaching unchurched kids, the church has been commissioned by God, as the place for fellowship, worship, training,

²⁰² Roger Felipe. *Connecting Postmodern Hispanic Teenagers to the Church: Principles and Strategies for Reaching and Keeping High School Kids in the Community of Faith*. (D.Min Thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2003), 271.

and spiritual growth. There has been a breakdown between the reaching of new-hearers with the gospel, and the church fulfilling its role in discipling new believers. The church's mandate to reach this group was issued by Christ and He promised the power of God's Spirit to help believers engage others with the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

This issue is of the utmost importance for the church today. Jimmy Long contends: "The decisions that the church is making today about how it will relate to society will influence the church's mission for the next fifty to one hundred years."²⁰³ This is an important consideration since as we have seen, many urban teenagers tend to be leaving the church, or not attending in the first place in the numbers they once did. This writer believes that with the proper balance of the teaching God's Word, and a solid, balanced, innovative program, young people can be reached with the gospel, and guided into becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ – ultimately drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3: 6).

Some urban churches are reluctant to utilize more contemporary means of expression during worship. The church must, however, become aware of how today's youth culture / younger generation / urban kids learn and how their culture has reinforced feelings and experiences. It is important that they learn how to "earn the right to be heard" without compromising the message. As the motto Youth for Christ International been for years: we must be "geared to the times, but anchored to the Rock." Irwin McManus admonishes the church on this point:

We reject technology and at the same time depend on it. We bring our cell phones into church and want the music to be unplugged. Our resolution to be

²⁰³ Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 18.

discomforted with technology will ensure that we remain at least fifty years behind. Even the most culturally conservative churches have no problem turning the light on. . . . Ironically, we tend to accept technologies that can produce creativity and convenience, while rejecting the technologies that can produce creativity and innovation. And of course, this is where friction can turn to traction.²⁰⁴

There are a variety of ways a church can learn to be relevant to the culture and adapt their services to be more “palatable” to the unchurched – to present the gospel in culturally relevant ways that are effective in reaching this (and future) generations before it is too late.

Obstacles Toward Change

One of the reasons churches are reluctant to implement change is the fear that by accommodating to the culture, one risks compromising the message of the gospel. Some churches are concerned – legitimately concerned, we should add – that in attempts to be relevant to the culture, we don’t allow compromise to set in. What this author has sought to discover throughout his ministry, is: when does being “relevant and contemporary” cross the line to become “dereliction and compromise”?

When one considers adapting a program to fit the needs of kids, one must be concerned about the issue of “accommodating for the sake of mission.” Capitulation to the culture for the sake of relevancy is not an option. In a Seminary Chapel message Dr. David Larsen admonished the students: “Our culture has plunged into pluralisms of every kind. As Mortimer Adler says: ‘pluralism when it comes to taste, yes. When it comes to the truth, no!’ The message of the gospel is not nebulous or obscure. Ours is a non-negotiable, uncompromising message.”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Irwin McManus. *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God had in Mind* (Loveland: Group, 2001), 49-50.

²⁰⁵ Dr. David Larsen in a message given in Chapel at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Spring, 1992.

It is a delicate balance for youth workers but an essential one: To ensure that in being relevant to the culture, one does not compromise its message or violate Biblical principles. But as Larsen further elaborates: “There has got to be a risk-taking flexibility in presenting this gospel; A willingness to hazard for the sake of the Gospel.”²⁰⁶ It is a necessary risk for the sake of the gospel. But it must be tempered with a commitment to the Scriptures.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, conspicuously absent from much of the Urban Theological Training Curricula are any references, ideas, or recommendations on the significance and impact of *youth* ministry in the city.

One text that did address the issue of youth ministry within the context of Urban Theological Education, and that was somewhat disappointing in their approach and philosophy of urban youth ministry. It was from a chapter in a book entitled “Urban Theological Education,” edited by Donald Rogers. The chapter was entitled: “White and Black Styles of Youth Ministry,” authored by William Myers, and it demonstrates one of the obstacles to significant change in some urban churches.

Myers shares the perspective of the distinction between “white” and “black” youth ministries without delineating the distinctives of each, or describing specifically how those ministries differ. He makes a rather inflammatory remark referring to what he called: “white style model of youth ministry” when he says: “Unless it is radically redirected, it carries values antagonistic to the implications of black style”²⁰⁷ Myers does not qualify, or define what he meant by that, but leaves us with the distinct impression

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ William Myers, quoted in Donald Rogers, Editor. *Urban Church Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), 131.

that something is intrinsically wrong with “white style models of youth ministry,” clearly advocating that youth ministry to kids of color should clearly have a “black” approach.

It was disappointing that what Myers referred to as having “white” approach to youth ministry, this author perceived as being a “progressive” approach to youth ministry. To Myers, ingredients he saw as new and different – which happened to be implemented in predominantly white churches and parachurch ministries -- were analogous to being “white.” The ingredients Myers refers to as “white” models, he declares as inapplicable to indigenous models of ministry. This author respectfully proposes that the models themselves don’t reflect *color* or *culture*; but reflect rather: *style* and *content*, which can cross cultures. The distinctive that makes “white youth ministry” what it is, is not the style of ministry – but the fact that white churches typically have the resources and training to stay in-tuned with the culture and adjust their programming to fit the emerging culture.

Rather than label churches and models of youth ministry as “black” or “white,” this author believes that we can learn an incredible amount from each other, and we have more in common than not. An objective analysis on current trends in youth ministry would reveal that the things that make a “white model of ministry” distinctive include the following:

1. A willingness to invest more substantially financially in youth ministry, thus giving them a youth ministry budget, resulting in, among other opportunities such as:
 - a. Qualified, paid part-time or full-time youth ministers,
 - b. Regular training for volunteers and staff,

- c. Resources: Curriculum, books, CD's videos, computers, Internet resources, etc.,
 - d. Camps and retreats
 - e. Activities and "big events" for the kids.
2. A commitment to implementing a vision, mission and strategy for youth ministry that includes the whole church and its overall vision.
 3. A willingness to adopt changes and have a "flexibility in ministry" mentality that facilitates a progressive approach and a "whatever-it-takes" to reach young people philosophy.

Many urban churches do not write a strategic plan for developing innovative ministry models which are useful in the designing and expansion of youth ministries. Much could be accomplished if churches developed a philosophy, vision and system for investigating, learning and implementing the things that work in reaching and discipling teenagers. The key is to find those methods and tools that would work best, and to find people who are willing and trained to implement those models of ministry.

It is interesting to note that Ray Bakke seems to be making a similar point to the one Myers proposes; specifically, that "urban missionaries" need to recognize the significance and importance of traditions and customs practiced in African American churches – traditions they may not want to change. He warns that those seeking to minister in another culture need to be cautious about not trying to force *their* cultural biases upon another.

The example Bakke cites is regarding the use of the King James Version of the Bible. Bakke advocates the use of the KJV in traditional African American churches,

from the perspective that in their culture the KJV has served as a “prayer language” and “code language” for generations.²⁰⁸ Although this author understands the point Bakke and Myers are making, and the sensitivity of the issues; the problem is that we now have a generation of young African Americans who did not (and are not) growing up understanding (or caring about) those traditions. The philosophy this paper is advocating, based on Scripture, is that we need to be culturally relevant ... for the sake of the reaching the unchurched with the gospel.

The very point Bakke is proffering is distorted, because the culture has changed. The dilemma now is: how to mediate – integrate the old and the new without losing one or the other. For if we abandon the old, we risk the anger and possible departure of the older members; but if we do not make allowances for the new, we hinder their interest in the church, and lose others who see the church as out of touch.

As this author has sought to point out in this paper, the concept of living in and ministering to the city is Biblical and dear to the heart of God. Further, the needs of the city are so great, and the resources to meet those needs so limited, it is incumbent upon every Christian leader in the city to do their part in helping to restore our at-risk communities.

Winning Ethnic Minorities

Although this paper is focusing on reaching young people, in a general sense, the church needs to examine its approach to evangelism in the city as a whole. With that in mind, there are some critical and foundational principles necessary for reaching people

²⁰⁸ Ray Bakke. *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 182-183.

with the gospel in the urban setting. Villafaña presents what he calls: the four essential “E’s for winning ethnic minorities to Christ”:

1. Empowering of Ethnic Leadership.

Among other things, “This means providing economic, political, material, educational, and human resources to the existing ethnic church. It is placing in their hands these resources with ‘no strings attached.’”²⁰⁹ He says: “All things being equal, and sometimes even when they may not be, an indigenous ethnic leader has greater and far more lasting impact than an outsider, whether it be an Asian ministering in Chinatown, a Black in an inner-city Black or transitional community, or a Hispanic in “El Barrio.”²¹⁰

This is one of those sensitive and controversial issues that most try to pass over without taking the time to confront. For years, missionaries have gone overseas and *done* ministry, literally for decades in one community. Likewise, local White American leaders have gone into the inner-city / urban setting and *done* ministry to minorities, often to the same people for years without a vision and a plan to empower, train and mobilize indigenous leadership. Indeed, the primary goal of any ministry in the urban setting (not to mention overseas missionaries), should be to empower indigenous leadership; “work oneself out of a job” and move on.

Unfortunately, not many organizations are designed with such a paradigm. This author believes there needs to be a paradigm shift among American evangelical organizations that has this as their primary goal and purpose. Missionaries – both overseas and at home – should literally be working their way out of a job.

²⁰⁹ Eldin Villafaña. *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, 51.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 51.

2. Evangelism that is Holistic.

Ministering in an urban setting virtually demands a holistic approach to ministry. The needs are so great, and the resources so few, it is impractical to expect to do effective ministry to people in urban settings without a plan to minister to the needs beyond the spiritual. That is what is referred to as a holistic approach. Ministries need to develop ministries that see people as “whole” beings, and thus meet a variety of needs presented in the city.

3. Education that is Contextual

So much of current literature, curriculum, resources etc., are written and presented in the context of white suburban America. This is especially true in relation to youth ministry material. There must be an intentional, deliberate effort to write and produce material that is relevant for, and specifically geared towards people living in an urban setting. This applies both on the professional ministry level, as well as on the academic research level. As Villafañe puts it:

If we are to win ethnic minorities for Christ, we must provide an ethnic approach to Christian education and Christian literature. This involves a conscious concern to accent the characteristics of a given ethnic group by making prominent history, culture, values, and beliefs. It means our curriculum should be consistent with the goals of a multiethnic and multicultural society. Teachers and curriculum within church schools serve as primary instruments for responding to the diverse needs of learners in a pluralistic society.²¹¹

For now, it is incumbent upon the urban leader, and we should add, the youth leader, to either take existing material and contextualize it for their own people, or write their own material -- both options, being very difficult for the already busy urban worker.

4. Ecclesiastical Structures that Liberate

²¹¹ Ibid., 53.

In order to effectively reach people for Christ, it is absolutely imperative that they have a place they can go to for religious instruction, worship, and fellowship in a structure that relates to them in a culturally relevant manner; especially as communities undergo cultural transitions. Villafañe advocates ministry models that would provide “a *context of ministry* with its distinct trends, cultural/ethnic diversity, and socioeconomic reality, coupled with the ‘health’ of the receiving and the original church ...”²¹²

Villafañe advocates ministry models that would provide “a *context of ministry* with its distinct trends, cultural/ethnic diversity, and socioeconomic reality, coupled with the ‘health’ of the receiving and the original church ...”²¹³

As we have pointed out earlier, many urban churches are not strategic and intentional about reaching out to the poor and/or are not relevant in their approach to the gospel – especially as it relates to reaching the next generation. Villafañe provides a foundation upon which to build a model of evangelism to reach a diverse group of people.

What Do Young People Look For In A Church?

In order to reach young people with the gospel, and get them interested in becoming involved in the local church, it is important to adapt our services to be relevant to this generation and the culture we are trying to reach.²¹⁴ Roger Felipe’s research on the Postmodern youth culture offers us a close examination on the question of what young people look for in a church.²¹⁵ He utilizes the research of George Barna and Steve Rabey to provide some insights to help us answer the question effectively. According to Barna,

²¹² Ibid., 56.

²¹³ Ibid., 56.

²¹⁴ Chapter 2 of this thesis addressed the importance of being culturally relevant to the group one is trying to reach, based on 1 Corinthians 9.

²¹⁵ Felipe. “Connecting Postmodern Hispanic Teenagers to the Church.”

when asked “How important is this factor?” in terms of their interest in a church in the future, seventy-six (76) percent said it is very important “how friendly the people in the church are to visitors.”²¹⁶ Scoring the same percentage was “how much the people seem to care about each other.”²¹⁷ It is interesting to note that both “the quality of the sermons that are preached” and “the theological beliefs and doctrine of the church,” scored sixty-six and sixty-four percent respectively as important factors.²¹⁸ While almost seventy-five percent answered that the “quality of the music in the service” was very or somewhat important to their choice in a church,²¹⁹ sixty-two stated that “the type of music in the weekend service” was a determining factor for them.²²⁰

A relevant factor for today’s youth is the role of being socially-sensitive. Barna says that ninety-six (96) percent believe that it is important “how much the church is involved in helping poor and disadvantaged people.”²²¹ The availability of other types of ministries and programs outside the regular weekend services scored high on the survey.²²² The “length of the sermons” and the “availability of midweek small groups or home groups to join” were somewhat important in their consideration (forty-eight and forty-nine percent respectively).²²³

What is interesting to note is that while many youth do not foresee church attendance as part of their young adult life, more than seventy-five (75) percent of blacks,

²¹⁶ Barna, *Real Teens*, 140.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

²²² *Ibid.*, 141.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 141.

whites and Hispanics believe that “The Christian churches in your community add real value to the life of the community.”²²⁴

One thing that is abundantly clear from the research is that evangelism in urban churches must take place outside of its walls. As discovered in our Hexagonning process, providing a variety of outreach programs and events are essential for reaching young people for Christ. Some believe the Sunday morning service is where evangelism must take place. For many adults, this is sufficient. However, in order to be effective in reaching this culture of teenagers in general, and urban teenagers specifically, evangelism *must* take place outside the context of the four walls of the church, and will be more effective when done in the context of meeting the social needs of the community.

Dr. Roger Felipe suggests that in order to win this generation to Christ, an “evangelistic mindset must be the *modus operandi* of every Christian.”²²⁵ Many of the principles of evangelism suggested by Felipe for reaching a Postmodern generation, are also applicable to reaching urban youth in general. Although inner-city or urban kids are not generally referred to as “Postmoderns,”²²⁶ nevertheless, many of the principles of evangelism overlap. This is due to the fact that the culture has changed so radically for virtually all young people in this generation.

Felipe points out that although evangelism can take place during a regular worship service, teenagers will need to be won on their turf.²²⁷ He proffers a list of specific entry points into the lives of teenagers and some strategy ideas that can be effectively used to reach out to (urban) teenagers. The relational aspect of some of these

²²⁴ Ibid., 114.

²²⁵ Felipe. “Connecting Postmodern Hispanic Teenagers to the Church,” 274.

²²⁶ Primarily because the sociological and philosophical grid that guide them are from culturally distinct.

²²⁷ Felipe. “Connecting Postmodern Hispanic Teenagers to the Church,” 274.

ideas are what make them especially relevant in engaging teenagers with the gospel in today's culture.

- Volunteer in a local high school to serve as a mentor to youth
- Develop an after school or evening tutoring program for children and youth in your community; use teenagers to tutor students
- Provide a conference for parents in the community on teenage sexuality, resolving family conflicts, or improving communication between teens and parents
- Visit parks and malls and engage willing youth in conversation; Share Christ with those willing to hear
- Call the county chaplaincy office and get names of youth and family members whose father is in jail. Visit the family and minister to their needs.
- Provide caring adults who will work with troubled teenagers and enter their lives to bless them
- Have a youth rally with appropriate music that will appeal to the unsaved. Follow the rally with fun activities and food. Have Christian youth mingle with visitors and then exchange email with them
- Invite youth into the life of a small group and let them experience spiritual worship and life in community
- Involve youth in ministry plans and let them carry out projects to inner city children and community reach out activities. Have church kids invite unsaved friends to join them in reaching out to the community
- Walk the city streets and ask questions to teenagers about family, life and God. Engage youth in parks and on the streets in conversation

- Visit the homeless and share a meal together, or visit migrant children
- Pass out literature at the beach and engage willing youth in conversation
- Have an extreme sport day at church and invite skaters and bikers to perform and show off their skills. Ask Christian youth to share their testimony.
- Encourage kids to take risks by hanging out with unsaved friends at the movies, in malls, or to invite them into their homes for a meal.
- Invite unsaved friends and their parents to a meal, picnic, beach activity or sports game
- Befriend neighborhood youth and minister to their needs as they arise and build relationships with their parents²²⁸

These principles, when applied can be effective in reaching unchurched young people. Unfortunately, most urban church programs are more Program-oriented, versus the recommended: relationally-oriented, which limits the long-term efficacy of the program. This can hinder the impact a program can have on kids because of the traditional emphasis on the preaching aspects of ministry rather than the holistic, innovative, and relational aspects exemplified mostly by the Parachurch.²²⁹

Characteristics of Urban Youth Workers

Before we look at specific models of urban youth ministry, it is important to consider some of the characteristics of current urban youth leaders with an examination of their needs. As the Learning Team for this thesis discovered, having a strong leadership team is one of the most essential ingredients of an effective urban youth

²²⁸ Felipe. "Connecting Postmodern Hispanic Teenagers to the Church," 274-276.

²²⁹ As pointed out earlier, many churches are changing this aspect of their paradigm, but it is still very prominent in many urban contexts.

ministry. Both personal leadership skills and leadership on the part of the church and parents scored highest in the hexagonning process.

Sometimes it is the mere dynamics and innate limitations of the leaders themselves that dictates the style and type of program they have. For example, if they are bi-vocational, as many are, they are limited in the amount of time they can put into developing and executing an effective youth ministry model.

In researching this issue, the Center for Youth and Family Ministries at Fuller Theological Seminary assembled a “Think Tank” of thirteen “innovative urban youth leaders from around the country in 2004.”²³⁰ Dan Hodge wrote an article on the findings of that Think Tank. Based on the findings, Hodge wrote that youth leaders often have the following characteristics:

- **Bi-vocational:** Many urban youth leaders are not paid, so they must have a separate job or jobs, thus giving them less time to devote completely to youth work.
- **Lack Training and Resources:** Unfortunately, many in the urban field are underfunded and lack basic resources.
- **Church-based:** Many are operating out of a church-based ministry that is seated within an urban community.
- **A New generation:** Because of the growth of technology, hip-hop culture, and media, youth workers have a vision of how the three relate to ministry. Although not to the same extent as the suburban worlds, the use of the internet has increased dramatically, even with those working in the heart of the inner-city.

²³⁰ Dan Hodge. “What Youth got 4 Me? Issues that Urban Leaders Want you to Know About.” 2/10/07. http://www.cyfm.net/article.php?article=what_you_got_for_me.html, 1.

- **Multi-ethnic and Racial:** A common stereotype is that urban means “African American,” “Inner-city/ghetto,” and/or “poor.” That is not the case many urban communities are rapidly changing, including Asian, Samoan, Filipino, Latin (from a number of Latin American and Spanish Countries), and white groups are more a part of urban ministry.
- **Holistic Ministry:** Ministers are more than just preachers; they are involved in many different areas of students’ lives. They see the big picture and see that to make a difference, they must be actively engaged fully in the lives of young people.²³¹

These characteristics highlight both the sacrificial aspects of youth leadership in the city (trying to juggle a full-time job, family responsibilities, and youth ministry); and the limitations they work with (lacking the training and resources they need). The Think Tank also discussed the profiles of Urban Youth Leaders (UYL). They concluded that they fell into one of three types:

TYPE OF LEADER	TYPICAL RESPONSIBILITIES	TYPICAL EXPERIENCE LEVEL
ORGANIZATIONAL LEADER	Holds influence over an organization or team, supervises staff, develops funds, creates and communicates vision.	5 or more years of ministry experience.
EMERGING LEADER	Some staff supervision, develops ministry programs, builds relationships with kids.	2 or more years of ministry experience.
GRASSROOTS LEADER	Builds relationships with kids.	All levels of ministry experience.

The Think Tank did not address specific training topics or youth ministry models for UYL, but based on their stated vision for youth ministry, they did brainstorm the

²³¹ Ibid., 1.

leadership needs of urban youth workers. According to the forum, the following are essential ingredients for youth leaders:

Leadership Skills: Skills in developing an organizational structure, networking, visioning strategic planning, management, communicating vision, holistic ministry, and administrative skills are needed.

- 1. Transformational Leadership:** Transformational Leaders are needed who can bring changes in relations between people, people and structures, people and God, and people and their geographical community. This means seeing youth as objects of ministry but as agents of transformation who can also bring about change.
- 2. Team Building:** Leaders need to have a vision for teams and not an individualistic mentality. The future is a collaboration and community, the leader who does not understand this will not be an effective leader.
- 3. More Indigenous Leadership:** The new generation urban leader often needs to be from the community in which they minister. This will drastically change the face of urban youth ministry.
- 4. More Women:** Simply put, more women need to be trained to be in positions of leadership. Women and girls encompass a large part of urban youth work and therefore leadership needs to reflect that.
- 5. Better Fundraising:** Given their financial needs, urban leaders need to gain the skills to properly fundraise.²³²

²³² Ibid., 3.

Developing a Paradigm for Youth Ministry to Unchurched Young People in the City

Characteristics of Effective Urban Youth Ministries

In addition to the characteristics of the youth leader, the Fuller Seminary Think Tank also provided principles that guide much of urban youth ministry today. These principles incorporate both what youth leaders are doing in urban ministry, and what they *should* be doing in urban ministry. Hodge reports that the team proffered the following:

- **Incarnational Youth Ministry:** This ministry philosophy is loosely defined as *ministry that is “with the people.”* In other words, incarnating Jesus within the contexts of youth in their environment situations. This is a fundamental principle for parachurch ministries such as Young Life, Youth for Christ and many others, but is one that is largely neglected by the urban church. The theology behind this principle is simple: Jesus was a people person and dwelt among the people.
- **Adult-based Relationships:** The Learning Team highlighted the importance and value of having the support and input of parents and other adults in the ministry. More and more ministries are beginning to recognize and use the power of adult mentors. Adults represent stable and wise role models for many people. Particularly in the inner-cities, adults are key in helping young people grow not only in their relationship with Jesus, but in helping them get jobs and proper education.
- **Students Reaching Students:** This is where students are discipled and trained by caring adults, but the students themselves are bringing their friends to church and to other activities.

- **Community is the Transformer:** The principle here is that “belonging comes before believing.” Put simply: for this postmodern generation, community is a large part of an individual’s life. For students it is key. Our ministries should be places where community is not only easy to find, but a vibrant part of what it means to be God’s people.
- **Students Understanding who Jesus is:** A basic component to growing in Christ is that students understand the person of Jesus. Students need a “theology 101” on Jesus’ life as a basic component of discipleship.
- **Basic Life Skills Training:** Students need help in basic life skills such as interviewing for a job, compiling a resume, developing good listening skills, and being ready for college. Many urban students are in dire need of these skills and as part of a servant-oriented ministry, many youth workers are leading programs to help students develop them.²³³

This author spent twelve years in a Parachurch, inner-city ministry that exemplified the principles delineated by Hodge. One of the most significant characteristics of such ministries is their emphasis on “Incarnational Youth Ministry.” It is one of the characteristics that distinguishes them from traditional church ministry – initially revolutionary to the church-at-large – now more commonplace at least in the average suburban church. Unfortunately it is one of the characteristics that is still lagging behind in the typical urban church. Many churches are still program-based, versus relational-based.

²³³Ibid., 2.

Some reasons this author believes these practices are not more common in current urban youth ministries is that they are time-intensive and adult-dependent factors. In other words, these principles require people to put in a significant amount of time in preparation and implementation. If the ministries are volunteer-driven, the leaders don't usually have the time or enough volunteers to implement these principles.

In his presentation of the "Prophetic Youth Ministry Model," Arzola presents four models of youth ministry, advocating the Prophetic as the most effective and holistic paradigm for ministering to urban youth. He notes that because of the integrative nature of the model, "its concern for urban youth, too, is holistic and integrative. This paradigm seeks to address the spiritual, personal, and social needs of urban youth."²³⁴

Implementing an Urban Youth Ministry Geared to Unchurched Young People

So how does one begin a youth group of urban kids . . . with virtually nothing to start with? It is important to note that there is no "magical formula." The needs of kids are as diverse as the cultures, ethnic groups and personalities of those who make up the inner-city and thus no one paradigm will fit all circumstances and there will always be a need to contextualize and improvise. However that is the essence of Christian ministry.

When this researcher began his ministry to urban kids, his outreach grew with the help of volunteers, and he was reaching close to one hundred students on a weekly basis in one of Miami's most prominent urban communities. One of the things that caught the attention of this writer is that he picked up kids in a van each week, he would pass over fifty churches in the community he did ministry. Many of these churches did not have *any* ministry to young people, and most of the ones that did, were struggling to maintain a

²³⁴ Fernando Arzola, Jr. "Four Paradigms of Youth Ministry in the Urban Context." The Journal of Youth Ministry, (5), 1, p. 4.

viable youth ministry, and keeping the kids attending. This author's heart was burdened with the reality that the mission of the church was to reach people with the gospel.

Bill Dillon, the founder and Executive Director of Urban Youth Impact, presents several approaches to helping kids in the inner-city. He talks about the “formal” and “informal” approaches. There are merits in both approaches. The formal model includes a more structured program that meets at a specific time, usually once per week, and usually in a building. In the informal model, a volunteer is matched with a kid and mentored in an informal process. In Youth for Christ we used to call this: “creative hanging out.” It is an opportunity to build into the lives of kids, spending quality time in a variety of contexts: Schools, at his home, at the park, mall, or just sipping a soda at a fast food restaurant. Usually, as Dillon suggests, the two approaches work hand in hand and are not mutually exclusive.

Dillon quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5-9 when he refers to the significance of “teachable moments” in youth ministry – The spontaneous opportunities that arise just from hanging out with kids in a natural environment such as their home or park. He also proposes a modern version of that passage if written in today's urban culture. The paraphrase highlights the incarnational nature of our ministry to urban kids being emphasized in this project. Dillon writes:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit in that inner city apartment and when you walk through the valleys, when you are playing hoops with them, when you lie down in the city parks and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your locked gates.²³⁵

²³⁵ William Dillon, “Reaching a New Generation for Christ,” article in John Fuder. *A Heart for the City*, 408.

Although there are no set formulas and no guarantees for a successful urban youth ministry, there are a few essential ingredients, which, if implemented, may by God's grace increase the likelihood of success. These ingredients, this author believes, will assist youth leaders in setting up a ministry for kids in the urban setting that will make it more likely they will want to keep coming back, and ultimately have long-term impact in their lives. Combined with principles offered by William Dillon, these principles are things this author has learned along his journey and this research has affirmed which could be helpful to youth workers starting a ministry in the city:

1. Be Visible and Accessible

Young people need to know that we are there for them. Although we must ensure we balance our own lives as urban youth workers, we must develop a model of ministry that lets kids know we are available. As Dillon points out: "We must put a high premium on remaining visible. Young people need to get to us. We must be willing to get to them ... Our actions in caring for people will speak far louder than any of our Bible studies."²³⁶

2. Go to Them and Meet Them on Their Level

This emphasizes meeting kids on their turf and spending time where they are. As mentioned throughout this project, this is one of the principles that most dramatically distinguishes the proposed model from the traditional church model. Most church ministry takes place in the church. The parachurch model emphasizes going where the lost are and meeting them on their level. Scripture tells us that the "Son of Man came to *seek* and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Youth leaders must be intentional about going beyond the walls of the

²³⁶ Ibid., 409-410.

church and into the communities and places where kids hang out. Youth workers also need to become acquainted with urban youth cultures and subcultures represented in urban communities.

3. Network with Others to Identify Resources.

Although admittedly, the resources are limited, they do exist. With careful examination of the community, one will begin to see the many resources available. As Dillon observes, “Many would be amazed if they were to set out to discover what other churches and agencies are doing within their community.”²³⁷

There are at least three basic resources one can begin to identify:

- a. Spiritual resources: You are able to equip yourself with Bible aids, books, Christian music, curriculum, videos, Christian Internet Websites, etc. Start with a few resources, and as you grow, you can add more to your resource library.
- b. Facility resources: You have access to a church building, homes, schools, gyms, parks and recreational facilities where you could possibly meet and host activities for kids. Check around to see what is available and what would work best for you. You can even rotate your meeting places.
- c. People resources: There are adults in your church or nearby parachurch organizations who may be able to help you. You should be able to find people who can serve as special guest speakers and/or local music groups who may come for a “love-offering” or moderate honorarium.

²³⁷ Ibid., 412.

The key is to identify the resources that might already be around you and available to you for little or no cost. There may be more resources than one might think.

4. Don't be Afraid to Start Small

A number of churches are reluctant to begin a youth ministry because they feel they don't have enough youth (see appendix 1). However, one does not have to feel pressured to have a large group of kids in order to have an effective ministry. It is perfectly acceptable to start with a small core group of students (5-7 is a reasonable amount to begin with). As you meet and build relationships, let the kids know what you plan to do. They will need to see your level of commitment, and know that you are not going to start something and leave in a few months. Once you have gained their trust, and an effective program is in place, you have laid the foundation for your ministry to grow. Student will then grow more comfortable to invite their friends.

5. Be Creative and Flexible

There is often a basic and traditional format for a youth group meeting, which is really a reproduction of the Sunday morning service. The format usually looks like this:

- Opening prayer / Devotions
- Announcements
- Worship
- Message
- Dismissal – Everybody goes home.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with that format, but there is so much more you could do with youth that would make the group exciting and would

inspire kids to keep coming back and invite their friends. Jim Rayburn, the founder of Young Life has said: “it is a sin to bore a kid with the gospel.”²³⁸

Early on in his ministry this author adopted the personal philosophy mentioned in Chapter 3, which basically had the approach/mindset to be “willing to do whatever it takes to reach kids ... as long it never compromises the message of Gospel or principles laid out clearly in Scripture.” The overriding principle in Paul’s letter in 1 Corinthians 9:22 was “... I have become all things to all men *so that by all possible means I might save some*” (Emphasis added).

Referring to the establishment of the New Testament Church in Scripture, Dr. Robert Coleman says, "The Church's policy of pragmatism encouraged creativity. The rule seemed to be: Within the guidelines of the apostles' teaching, whatever facilitates the ministry, do it ... what was important is that the most helpful means be found in every setting to accomplish the task at hand.”²³⁹

According to Harvey Conn and Manuel Ortiz: “In order to see disciples appear, we must evangelize persons in their social and cultural matrices.”²⁴⁰ They make the point that we need to explore how to effectively contextualize the gospel so as to bring people to Christ. Regarding 1 Corinthians 9, Ortiz and Conn quote from Schreck and Barrett when they say:

Winning “the more” (vs. 19) involves discovering and eliminating whatever offends or confuses (so far as lifestyle, message presentation, methodology) and enhancing what will maximize the number of those who become obedient to the gospel. This necessarily implies a careful knowledge of the group to whom the evangelist directs his or her ministry. What are their values, beliefs, and ways of making decisions? What

²³⁸ Jim Rayburn, quoted in Jim Burns and Mike Devries. *The Youth Builder* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light Pub., 2001), 30.

²³⁹ Robert Coleman. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Revell Company, 1972).

²⁴⁰ Harvey Conn and Manuel Ortiz. *Urban Ministry* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 315.

adjustments must be made in methods, media or roles if there is to be a culturally authentic opportunity to respond to the gospel?²⁴¹

This author believes one key to effective youth ministry is variety. It is important to periodically do things radically different – to create the *element of surprise*, so the kids don't know what to expect. Incorporate as many creative ideas as possible and rotate their use. Examples could be things like:

- Crowdbreakers – opportunities for kids to burn energy and have fun
- Drama / skits
- Special music – use various forms of contemporary Christian music: hip hop, rap, etc.
- Dance
- Videos / video clips
- Creative messages on relevant topics, and
- Lively, interactive discussions

It is important to keep experimenting with new ministry ideas. You might find that there are things that might work with one group of kids during a particular time, may not work with another set of kids. It is important to have a “flexible methodology” approach to ministry. Be sensitive to the needs of your group in order to reach them where they are, and adjust your program to meet those needs.

6. Develop A Balance Between Healthy Fun And Building Relationships

In this author's experience, the vast majority of un-churched, urban youth initially come to youth group for two basic reasons: fun and relationships. It is not

²⁴¹ Ibid., 315.

uncommon or abnormal for young people to want to have fun and develop relationships. We (as human beings) are “wired for connection,” and young people are also “wired for fun.”²⁴²

- a. Fun – The element of fun come in a variety of ways: through games, field trips, camps, all-nighters, and many other activities. Although this might not be a revolutionary principle to most, many churches are still reluctant to incorporate fun into their youth services. This writer has heard it said many times: “You’re just entertaining those kids.” The key word here is: “just.” If all you are doing is having fun and playing games with kids, then an argument could be made for what is the purpose of a “youth ministry.” If, however, you are incorporating fun as an integral part of what you do in youth ministry, mixed in with solid Biblical teaching, that would be a healthy and balanced approach to youth ministry, and
- b. Relationships – Peer relationships is a critical component to an effective youth ministry. But in addition to kids making friends with their peers, they also develop relationships with caring adults who serve in that ministry. During that process, the adults don’t just see a name on a roster; but who take the time to find out how the kids are doing in school, and to talk openly and honestly about issues taking place in their lives. This often eventually leads to kids feeling comfortable to talk about spiritual things, and ultimately opens doors for us to share our faith with the kids.

The Apostle Paul told the church in Thessalonica: “we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives

²⁴² Some would argue that the “wiring for fun” doesn’t go away.

as well . . .” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Dr. Howard Hendricks reminds us that “you can impress people from a distance . . . you can only impact them from up close.”²⁴³

7. Find Ways to Involve the Youth in Ministry

According to Dr. Robert Laurent, the number one reason why kids leave the church is “lack of opportunity for church involvement.”²⁴⁴ Kids need to feel that they are significant and valued by the community of faith. If they don’t feel that from the church, they will go somewhere else where they can feel a sense of belonging. One of the most significant lures of cults and gangs is that they immediately give young people responsibilities and opportunities for involvement, and they become part of the community.

As pointed out in chapter 1, in relationship to what kids are looking for in a church, Barna discovered that ninety-six (96) percent believe that one of the most important things in today’s generation is how much the church is involved in helping poor and disadvantaged people.²⁴⁵

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu in his book, *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, quotes a gang leader as saying: “We will always get the youth because we know how to make them feel important.”²⁴⁶ Often in our church and other settings, we make children feel like they are not important. We push them

²⁴³ Dr. Howard Hendricks in a talk to Youth for Christ at their staff conference in 1998.

²⁴⁴ Robert Laurent. *Keeping Your Teen in Touch with God: Why Teens Turn Away From the Church and How to Prevent it* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Pub., 1988).

²⁴⁵ Barna. *Real Teens*.

²⁴⁶ Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu. *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. V 1. (African American Images, 1983).

aside, we tell them to be quiet when they speak up, and we rarely set aside special programs for them.

We must make our young people feel significant and important, most especially when they are visiting or are new to the program. But an overall welcoming atmosphere is a great enhancement to the youth ministry. If we do not, as they get older they may build up such an aversion to church they no longer attend.

A children's pastor who involves the kids in his group in the actual production of Children's Church, gives the story of a 10 year-old whose mother told him he would not be able to attend their home Church that day because they were visiting somewhere else. The very adamant child looked at his Mother and said: "But Mom, you don't understand. We have to go to our Church ... Pastor Dan needs me!" The sense of ownership and responsibility was so ingrained in the child, he grasped the value of his contribution to the group. Give the kids real responsibilities. Let them know you believe in them and that they are valuable to you and to the growth and development of the group.

8. Include Substantial Bible Teaching

As our Learning Team highlighted, there must be a substantial spiritual component to our youth ministry programs. Earlier this paper mentioned that one needs to be creative and flexible in programming. That however, does not mean to compromise or water down the message. Youth Ministry is not solely a social program. A church youth ministry needs to go beyond fun and games. The key here is balance.

Some youth ministries are more focused on social service issues (as demonstrated in Fernando Arzola's writings); some place an emphasis on fun activities, games, and events, and some put more focus on evangelism, discipleship and the "teaching of the Word." As Arzola points out, the preferred approach to youth ministry should be a balance of all the above, and must include an emphasis on the teaching of Biblical truth.

9. Be Committed for the Long Haul.

Almost nothing is stable in a young person's life in the inner-city. The national statistic is that the average youth pastor remains at a church for about eighteen months. That is not enough time for effective ministry, especially in the urban setting.

Although the national statistic is that approximately 50 percent of all teenagers are growing up in single-parent homes, Dr. John Perkins points out that the numbers are drastically different in the inner-city. He says the number is as high as 70 percent of inner-city children are growing up without a father. In order to make ends meet, the single-parent might have to move frequently, thus changing neighborhoods, friends and schools. If there is one thing that should remain consistent, it should be their youth worker, who is very often the one positive adult role model a child may have. Youth ministry in the urban setting is just one of those fields that you cannot do for a short period of time and expect significant results. You must have a long-term commitment to the kids, their families and their neighborhoods.

Regarding being committed for the long haul, Dillon points out: “Most kids in the city have watched people come into their lives and go out as quickly ... Your staying power can make a significant difference. To be effective, you need to put down roots.”²⁴⁷ This author has seen the results of being committed to urban ministry for the long haul, and has had the blessing of seeing a number of young peoples’ lives changed by the power of God.

Although many youth ministries are progressive in their vision, thinking and implementation, there are still numerous churches and ministries that are holding on to traditional models and wondering why kids are not attending youth group anymore. Appendix 1 is an email this author received during the writing of this thesis, and exemplifies the significance of this research project. It serves as an example of a typical urban church this author works with, and demonstrates the needs of the urban church. This author believes that the best way to positively impact those who are practicing “traditional” youth ministry is to provide training for them. There may be some who are not receptive to new ideas; others who might be limited to the status quo based on church leadership; and still others who might be limited by staff, resources, and the necessary skills needed. But we must make every attempt to provide assistance, because the stakes are too high.

This writer was tremendously moved by a message given by Ron Hutchcraft to a group of Youth for Christ staff. He closed the conference by sharing these words: “If you

²⁴⁷ William Dillon, “Reaching a New Generation for Christ,” article in John Fuder. *A Heart for the City*, 413-414.

really want to reach lost people, reach them with people they know, in a place they feel comfortable, through an issue they care about, and a program they can relate with.”²⁴⁸

Theological Education in the Urban Context

It is the premise of this thesis, that there are not enough training opportunities for youth workers seeking to get involved in urban youth ministry. This is true for both “formal” training (e.g. Colleges and Seminaries), and “informal” or “non-formal”²⁴⁹ training (e.g. Church denominations and parachurch organizations). Let us turn our attention to the issue of formal Theological Education in the Urban Context.

Urban theological education has been vastly lacking in Christian Colleges and Seminaries over the years. In light of our changing times, changing world, and changing urban communities in America, it is of paramount importance that we strategically develop and improve a system for educating people working in urban contexts. Dr. Douglas Hall points out that “Students of the city must be prepared spiritually and psychologically, socially and strategically, to minister in an area that is complex, heterogeneous, dynamic, and manipulative.”²⁵⁰

For too long, “formal” educational institutions have focused on training professional bi-vocational ministers, usually within a scholarly and academic context with stringent qualifying acceptance policies. The presumption for ministerial training has traditionally been a white (predominantly male), graduate-level student, with a strong background in Biblical languages, and other theological prerequisites. It also presumed a

²⁴⁸ Message given by Ron Hutchcraft at a Youth for Christ Seminar in 2005.

²⁴⁹ The terms “informal” and “non-formal” education refer to instruction or training that occur outside the context of a formal school, and is usually less structured.

²⁵⁰ Douglas Hall, quoted in Eldin Villafañe. *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, 98.

long period of time investment (a minimum of three years post-Bachelor's for a Master of Divinity), and a significant amount of financial resources.

In this paradigm, there was very little room or acceptance, for urban clergy, many of whom had already been in ministry and did not have the academic background or financial resources of other typical seminary students. What should a student who fit that profile do?

One might be relegated to continue ministry with little (or sometimes no) formal training. It is suggested that Seminaries and Christian Colleges could and should provide alternative forms of education that would service such ministers, and help equip them more adequately for the complex responsibilities of ministering in urban settings today.

In "Transforming the City," Professor Villafaña et. al., present models of Theological Education that are responsive to the needs of ministry leaders in a variety of urban settings. By incorporating the philosophical framework, and curriculum design along with case studies, the authors show how this new wave of Christian Education is revolutionizing how we prepare ministers working in America's cities.²⁵¹

By tracing the history of urban theological education, and chronicling its progress, they show how we have come to where we are from meager beginnings of Bible Institutes in the city, to full Urban Ministry training programs at the highest level of academic designation. Of particular interest to this writer as a trainer and educator in Miami's urban community, are the existing models for training urban youth leaders in both formal and/or nonformal contexts.

²⁵¹ Bruce Jackson, quoted in Eldin Villafaña. *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

Dr. Bruce Jackson contends that historically, theological education has not seriously considered the experiences and issues facing ethnic minorities. One *could* make the argument that “theological education” is neither “Black, White, nor Hispanic.” Theological education just ... is. But few would argue that there are nuances, philosophies, and certainly emphases within theological education that are omitted in a school that is taught (and operated) by predominantly white academicians.

The authors point out that minority concerns in theological education are conspicuously absent from the general curriculum of traditional theological education. He contends that there are more and more minorities who would like to further their education, but are limited because of the mere restraints imposed by the various institutions, making religious education prohibitive for many. Restraints such as academic pre-requisites, finances, language barriers and class scheduling issues as well as the issue of contextualization, to name a few. To many, Christian Colleges and Seminaries were just not addressing the issues that are most relevant to where they are coming from.

More institutions are finally “catching up” with the culture, and addressing those issues with creative models that accommodate the urban student. The authors document the establishment and progress of a number of alternatives that Colleges and Seminaries are finally beginning to address, making it more conducive for students to pursue higher education in a culturally relevant, theologically flexible and financially affordable context.

Robert Smith says: “If the cities of the world are going to be reached with the message of the Gospel, it will be necessary for the church to tap into the vast resources of

college students, especially students within our Christian colleges, and prepare them for the task of effective ministry.”²⁵²

This author would make the case that in order to be more effective and relevant in urban settings, the training would have to go beyond the “traditional” college context, since only a small percentage of people who will be willing to work in the city will necessarily go to a formal Christian College setting. It is incumbent upon us to design creative training opportunities for people working in the city beyond the “formal” college setting. There needs to be training opportunities in nonformal settings, seminars, etc., to maximize our efforts in impacting urban communities.

Although limited, there are a few training programs with national exposure and reputations that have begun in recent years to offer training seminars and conferences in both formal and nonformal contexts. With the explosion of the internet, many of these programs are more accessible than they would have been in the past. Although there have been great strides, more needs to be done to streamline the training programs; get churches to value and invest in the training; and to get youth leaders to pursue the programs.

Many of the programs that exist are *exclusive*, in the sense that they are designed for in-house training. For example, Parachurch organizations may offer training for their staff and volunteers. Some church denominations offer conferences and seminars for their leaders at State Conventions or other venues. But these are often cost-prohibitive, and only a small representation of leaders are able to attend. Very often, depending on the organization / denomination, the training does not address urban issues.

²⁵² Smith, “Training College Students for Urban Ministry,” article in John Fuder. *A Heart for the City*, 125.

Elements for an Effective Seminary-Based Urban Theological Program

There are some colleges and seminaries which offer specific courses and/or programs for urban youth leaders. Since a large part of the focus of this research is on the equipping and training of those who work in the urban setting, a part of the study is on developing formal and/or informal structures of learning for them. Villafañe presents what he refers to as the “six essential elements for an effective seminary-based urban theological education program.”²⁵³ We will briefly outline those elements.

Constituency

For this ingredient, Villafañe asks the question: “To whom are we educating?” Considering the profile of the constituents mentioned above, Villafañe suggests there is a wide variety of people within the urban setting desirous of and in need of solid theological training. He identifies the distinction between the “clergy” vs. “people of God” paradigm referring to lay leaders in contrast to professional ministers – both vocational and bi-vocational, and proposes that people in both categories need to have access to such training.²⁵⁴

Contextualization

According to Villafañe: “To contextualize our urban educational endeavors is to ‘pitch our tent,’ meaning the seminary resources – financial, intellectual, or personnel – in the context of urban ministry. It is to humbly express an ‘urban kenosis’ – emptying oneself for the service of others.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Villafañe. *Seek the Peace of the City*, 78.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 78.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 81.

Curriculum

It is incumbent upon each school to develop appropriate curriculum that adequately services the students who attend. In that light, the school must develop curriculum that, as Villafañe says, must focus on the following three objectives:

- (1) to *form* pastors and teachers (and other leaders) among the people of God;
- (2) *inform* them about the Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in social, cultural, and concrete historical contexts; so that
- (3) they may serve as agents of *transformation* in the churches, denominations, and social communities in which God has placed them.²⁵⁶

Community

It is important that the school develop a good, working relationship with the community it is in and seeks to service. The school cannot operate effectively independently of the community. It would be wise for the school to develop urban representation on their board of directors and/or add a board of advisors that is representative of the community.

Coexistence with Host Seminary

It is also essential for the urban branch of the school to be integrally tied in and cohesive with the host seminary. The host seminary should have a long-term vision and commitment to the whole concept of urban theological training, and the urban school should also be committed to the mission, vision and theological foundations of the seminary.

Cost

It goes without saying, that “A sure indication of a seminary’s commitment to urban ministry is its *financial* investment.”²⁵⁷ One of the most significant obstacles for

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 85.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 94.

urban clergy to pursue theological studies is the huge cost factor. If a theological school is going to truly demonstrate its commitment to training urban leaders, it must be diligent in procuring substantial funding for the program and thus enabling those who cannot afford it to still be able to attend.

Preparing Students for Ministry

Smith provides practical ways we can train the college student for effective urban ministry. The key question for this research would entail the content of the training. Smith begins with two Biblical passages that go to the heart of training and equipping others: The first is Eph. 4:12 where it is stated that God distributes gifts to every believer “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service.” Clearly the priority of the gifts is not just *possessing* the gifts, but using the gift for the training and equipping of others, thus multiplying ourselves in others.

The second passage is 1 Timothy 1:5 (NASB) where Paul writes that the “goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and good conscience and a sincere faith.” Says Smith:

These passages reveal a balance that is needed in educating students for urban ministry. On one hand the college student needs to be taught how to *do* the service of urban ministry. The focus of this training will be task-oriented. It will have as its goal the preparation of the student to be able to function as an urban servant. The student learns how to present the Gospel in the urban context, how to do community development, and how to minister to the poor and disenfranchised.²⁵⁸

Training programs need to be practical and engaging, and to the best of their ability have some form of hands-on component -- Perhaps in the form of an Internship or mentored ministry. Whatever the context, the training needs to move outside the context

²⁵⁸ Smith, “Training College Students for Urban Ministry,” article in John Fuder. *A Heart for the City*, 126.

of the academic – the theological and the theoretical – and into the practical. It must answer the question: “How do we do effective youth ministry?” As Smith says:

... the college student also needs to be taught how to *be* an urban minister. Students need to be taught how to be servants who love the people of the city, clearly conscious about their call to the city, and with strong dependence on God’s divine resources. These goals are much more difficult to measure in the educational context. Character development is crucial for those going into urban ministry.²⁵⁹

The goal in educating the youth leader – whether in the formal or non-formal setting – is to prepare the student with the knowledge and experiences to *do* and to *be* an urban youth minister. Smith proposes that the student needs to acquire four areas of cognitive knowledge if he is going to be effective. “First, the student needs to learn to *think biblically and theologically* about urban ministry.”²⁶⁰ Smith contends that many people doing urban ministry in the city do not have formal Christian college or seminary training, and learned from the “University of the Hood.” They have learned through trial and error what works and what does not work. Smith believes that Bible College students are not given enough *Biblical Theology*, which he says needs to come before one even studies the formal *Systematic Theologies*.

Secondly, students need to think *sociologically*. Smith gives the example that we can learn from our Bibles that all people are sinners (Rom. 3:23), but when we look at patterns of sin in a society we are doing sociology. “Sociology,” Smith says, “is one of the family of social sciences that seeks to explain patterns of human behavior. Specifically, sociology is the study of the groups and societies people create and how these, in turn, effect the people who create and maintain them.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 127.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 127.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 128.

The third principle in educating the urban student is to think *anthropologically*. Students who are coming from a different cultural and/or ethnic perspective, usually bring with them their own preconceived notions of the culture they are going into, and their inclination is often to superimpose *their* ideas, culture, styles and traditions upon the culture to whom they are ministering.

As Smith puts it, “it is important that the (student) understand the cultural intricacies of the urban landscape ... The student who thinks anthropologically will attempt to discover cultural similarities, differences, and patterns he observes within the urban context. The student does this to find out the rituals, rules, traditions, norms, mores, and folkways as they relate and affect urban context.”²⁶²

It is not uncommon to have “inner-city missionaries” come in and bring – not only the gospel – but their own cultural perspectives and biases as well. There are certain things they may perceive as “wrong” or simply “bad practices,” which to the culture are just “their way of doing things.” Sometimes it is a little difficult to address when to try to *change* the culture, and when to understand and accept what they are doing as part of their culture.

Clearly, there are things that are distinctly wrong: things against the Bible, against the law, or things that are just not healthy. But there are also things that are just culturally distinctive – and need to be left that way. Issues this author had to deal with when starting out in urban ministry were things like dress codes, hairstyles, body piercing, music and language (specifically profanity or the use of Ebonics and slang). It was a struggle to determine when was it acceptable, and when was it necessary to address the issue. One

²⁶² Ibid., 130-131.

has to determine what issues originate from just an evangelical, conservative, western, mindset; and what issues are distinctly ones that violate the principles of Scripture.

One thing Smith recommends is to do “exegesis” of the city – to engage the students in a “city walk” to look at the various cultures in represented in various neighborhoods within the greater urban setting. “This ethnographic experience helps them think anthropologically about ministry in the city.”²⁶³

Fourthly, students are taught to think *Multiculturally*. Smith points us to Jaime S. Wurzel who writes: “human existence is inherently and universally multicultural, even though through history, mankind has resisted recognizing it.”²⁶⁴

It is estimated that by the year 2050, the American population will reach an estimated 394 million people, an increase of 49 percent, with the most significant increase among the nonwhite population.

It has been projected that the white population will increase in number to 207 million people, but decrease in total percentage to 53 percent of the overall population. African-Americans will increase to 54 million (14 percent). Native Americans will remain at 1 percent of the population, but their overall numbers will double to 3.5 million; Asians/Pacific Islanders will increase to 32 million (8 percent); and Latinos will grow to 97 million (24 percent).²⁶⁵

Therefore the urban ministry student must learn how to think multiculturally. “Thinking multiculturally the student must 1) become aware of one’s own ethnocentric conditioning and 2) accept the fact that society is indeed multicultural.”²⁶⁶

It has been noted that an essential component of training for urban ministry needs to be the practical in addition to the theoretical. It is unreasonable to expect that students are going to learn from a classroom all they need to know to do urban ministry. Smith

²⁶³ Ibid., 131.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 131.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 132.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 132.

cites nineteenth century scholars like John Dewey who were advocates of experiential learning. Dewey taught that “experiential learning meant a cycle of ‘trying’ and ‘undergoing’ by becoming aware of a problem, getting an idea, trying out a response, experiencing consequences, and either confirming or modifying previous conceptions.”²⁶⁷

This philosophy can often be seen implemented in many programs that require internships, work-study programs, laboratory classes and field projects. This should be particularly true for urban ministry programs, and youth ministry training programs. Smith suggests three ways urban training programs can make this aspect of field-training feasible:

1. *Be located in the inner-city.* He uses Moody Bible Institute as an example of how conducive it is to have the college located in the city, and thus being able to provide field experience, literally outside the doors of Moody. Another example is CUME (the Center of Urban Ministerial Education), the extension campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, located in Boston. Unfortunately many schools are located away from the city, and thus, even if they wanted to offer an urban ministry program, they are not conveniently located with easy access to the city.

If the school is not close to an urban setting, two other options would be to either offer an exchange-student policy as many schools do with overseas exchange students, or to offer satellite campus offerings, utilizing urban church buildings and adjunct professors to accommodate the classes in contrast to moving the whole school. A number of schools offer this type of

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 133.

satellite campus, including Trinity International University, offering classes in Chicago, and an entire campus satellite in South Florida.²⁶⁸

2. Students need to be given a *significant amount of inner-city field work*. The training must go beyond the classroom, and into the *laboratory*. “As the laboratory is to the physical sciences, so is the city the training ground for urban ministry. Fieldwork projects, like demographic and ethnographic research, have to be an integral part of the urban educational program.”²⁶⁹
3. Students need to be given an opportunity not only to *attend* classes in the city, but to also have the opportunity to *live in the city while doing their studies*. Smith points out that several schools currently offer that for their students including: Bethel College in Minneapolis, offering housing in its “Urban House,” and Wheaton College in partnership with Emmaus Ministries, on Chicago’s North side. As Smith says, “having the students live, study and serve with an inner city ministry may provide the focus needed for career selection.”²⁷⁰

The Role Of Teachers in Preparing Students for Urban Ministry

Preparing students for urban youth ministry is not an easy task. As with many fields of study, the theoretical and philosophical issues are not sufficient to adequately

²⁶⁸ Author’s note: Trinity International University’s South Florida program, offers a program that is not distinctly “urban.” Although classes have been offered in the Greater Metropolitan Miami and surrounding areas, and taught by mostly urban practitioners from the city of Miami, the curriculum is not *distinctly* urban. Most of the curriculum is actually derived from the Deerfield campus, thus not reflecting a true urban perspective. This is usually often noted by the students, most of whom are urban minorities ministering in South Florida. Although it is apparently necessary for the curriculum to originate from the Deerfield Campus, to maintain the integrity and consistency of the program, it is this author’s belief that steps could and should be made to create their own curriculum by the Professors who have full credentialing from accredited graduate schools. As an adjunct Professor, this is one step this author wishes to see Trinity take.

²⁶⁹ Smith, “Training College Students for Urban Ministry,” article in John Fuder. *A Heart for the City*, 134.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 135.

prepare someone for the complexities of working in an urban setting. There is going to have to be some component of hands-on, practical ministry opportunities, as well as a committed role on the part of the teacher. As Smith puts it, “If Bible schools and Christian colleges are going to prepare men and women for urban ministry, it will take faculty that becomes more actively involved in the lives of the students.”²⁷¹

Smith points out that many professors come with a background of teaching, research, and writing, and do not necessarily have practical experience ministry. This is certainly not true of *all* teachers, but clearly some teachers do not come with a strong background of hands-on ministry experience, particularly in urban settings.

Smith proposes that this would have to be different for those teaching students to do urban ministry. He aptly points out that “If students are going to be prepared and trained for urban ministry, they will need teachers to fulfill the role of mentor.” Smith goes on to explain that:

The mentoring process can be defined as a ‘relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources.’ Based on this definition, the teachers of urban ministry will need to invest their time and themselves into the lives of their students. There are no shortcuts to the development and maintenance of mentoring relationships with college students.²⁷²

In order to train urban workers in the city effectively, Smith proposes a model of faculty-student mentoring relationships where faculty take on more than a role of “lecturer” but becomes a “mentor” and a “guide” to students; teaching them not just the academics and theology of urban ministry, but walking them through practical principles. He advocates taking a more hands-on approach.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 136.

²⁷² Ibid., 137.

Of course he is careful to point out that this may not be financially feasible for institutions with the faculty-to-student ratio, but he provides creative means by which schools could provide those kinds of mentoring relationships through more adjunct faculty and with church partnerships, internships and the like. Internships become win-win situations, where the student has the opportunity to learn from a more experienced urban minister, and the urban minister gets the benefit of a volunteer who can assist in the ministry without needing to obtain a paycheck. The student also benefits from getting college credit for the internship.

Christian College and Seminary-Based Urban Ministry Programs

As has been pointed out, there are a number of schools that are seeking to meet the need of training urban leaders, and specifically urban youth leaders for ministry. We will briefly look at a few of those schools and some of their distinctives and/or courses they offer.

Fuller Theological Seminary – Has developed the Center for Youth and Family Studies (CYFM), and offer an emphasis on Urban Youth Studies. They have designed an Urban Youth Ministry Certificate program under the leadership of Dr. Kara Powell. The program is designed for those who would like to be trained in youth ministry, but do not necessarily need or desire a seminary degree. The program covers the following four courses and corresponding topics:

Course #1: Theology and Philosophy of Urban Youth Ministry

1. A theological method to apply to daily life
2. Understanding and experiencing the Kingdom of God
3. Embracing and communicating through narrative theology/God's story
4. Reaching kids through incarnational evangelism
5. Embodying the missional church
6. Interacting with culture
7. Understanding multicultural issues, racial reconciliation, and ministry

Course #2: Leadership and Management of Urban Youth Ministry

1. Developing and understanding organizational structure
2. Developing and communicating vision
3. Creating strategic plans
4. Developing administrative skills
5. Fundraising and resource development
6. Developing a team
7. Raising indigenous leaders
8. Conducting program evaluation

Course #3: Transformational Urban Youth Ministry

1. Adolescent development
2. Evangelism and discipleship
3. Counseling kids who have been traumatized
4. Creating family ministry
5. Developing holistic ministry
6. Exegeting your context, the city
7. Networking with other church and parachurch ministries in your city

Course #4: The Person of the Urban Youth Worker

1. Personal needs
2. Learning to walk with Christ in the midst of suffering
3. Maintaining health in your own family
4. Developing boundaries
5. Maintaining balance
6. Developing your own peer community
7. Creating accountability relationships
8. Ministry needs:
9. Mentoring
10. Networking
11. Understanding and using your spiritual gifts²⁷³

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary – Created the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME), with a new downtown campus in Boston. Among other degrees geared for urban leaders, CUME offers a Master's degree in Youth Ministry and a Master's in Urban Ministry.

Dean Borgman, the director of the program, has developed a comprehensive program to prepare youth leaders for urban ministry. Courses in the program include:

²⁷³ Fuller Theological Seminary, <http://www.cyfm.net/certificate.php>, 12/16/06.

- Theology and Principles of Dynamic Youth Ministries
- Models of youth ministry
- Ministering to Troubled Youth
- Understanding Youth culture
- Communicating the Gospel to Youth
- Adolescent Spirituality
- Strategy and Management of Youth Programs, and
- Urban Streetworkers program²⁷⁴

Eastern University – Offers a major in Youth Ministries, with a special “sensitivity” to urban and global issues. To prepare these students for their varied ministries, Eastern offers a wide range of courses including Ministry in the Urban Setting (YM 403), Ministry with Troubled Youth (YM 207), Ministry in the High School Setting (YM 202) as well as various courses in Sociology and Missions. According to their vision:

Our training must be culturally sensitive. If our message is firmly moored to biblical truth, we are free to explore an unending variety of strategies and methods for reaching an audience with the kind of unique characteristics of the adolescent. Our training is designed to equip graduated to walk into various cultures and adapt the basic principles of youth ministry to their particular situation.²⁷⁵

Existing Non-Formal Training Programs / Models

Parachurch-Based Training Programs

Most Parachurch organizations offer their own “in-house” training for their staff and volunteers. Organizations such as Youth for Christ, Young Life, Campus Crusade for Christ, and others, usually offer their own training. But sometimes even *their* training

²⁷⁴ Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/boston/overview/programs.php#youth>, 12/16/06.

²⁷⁵ Eastern University, http://www.eastern.edu/academic/trad_undg/sas/depts/youthmin/vision.shtml, 12/16/06.

does not include a specialization on urban issues. As was the case with this author, the training for urban staff is often lacking in comprehensiveness, intensity and depth. There is often just a terse treatment of urban issues.

Special Urban Training Programs: In recent years, a few organizations have emerged, specializing in training “lay” urban youth leaders in non-formal contexts. We will briefly examine a few of these organizations:

KingdomWorks -- Begun in the late 1980’s by Bart Campolo was a National Conference for UYL, based in Philadelphia, eventually starting a second location in Chicago. This was the first and only conference of its kind which had the specialization of reaching urban youth workers, and with a national focus. KingdomWorks (KW) also launched a smaller, more intense training program for local youth leaders called the “Philadelphia Project for Youth Ministry”²⁷⁶ (PPYM), made possible by a grant from the Pew Foundation. KW was later acquired by Compassion International’s USA division, and the conference became known as: “CompassionWorks.” Although somewhat successful for a few years, the conference did not reach the levels it once did under Campolo’s leadership – perhaps due in part to the personal relationships he developed in the city. Now with him not at the helm, the numbers of annual attendees began to diminish, and Compassion decided to change their models for their USA programs.

Hispanic Ministry Center / Urban Youth Workers’ Institute – The Hispanic Ministry Center was founded by Dr. Larry Acosta in the mid-1990’s, as an organization designed to “expedite the development of existing and emerging Hispanic youth leaders.”²⁷⁷ Their

²⁷⁶ PPYM later became a division of KingdomWorks, and changed the name of the program to “MUD” (Making Urban Disciples).

²⁷⁷ Urban Youth Workers Institute, <http://uywi.org/?do=about&id=360>, 12/16/06.

goal is to “develop indigenous urban youth leaders to shepherd the next generation.”²⁷⁸

Although initially a California-based program, the program began to grow, and their small staff was receiving more and more requests from urban youth leaders from around the country. As the organization expanded, they added the Urban Youth Workers’ Institute – a very successful national conference for urban youth leaders. Somewhat propelled by the persistent cry of urban youth leaders, and responding to the obvious needs, Dr. Acosta has accepted the mantle of leadership to spearhead the ministry of training leaders across the country.

UYWI training takes place in three basic contexts / forms: 1) an annual national conference each May, 2) through RELOAD -- a one-day training program, now operating in a number of U. S. cities, and 3) the development of “Learning Communities,” where a local facilitator is empowered to lead a “community of learners” through monthly book-reading / analysis and 2 retreats for the year.

For the last several years, the Hispanic Ministry Center has hosted the Urban Youth Workers Institute. This event has grown from a small gathering of 200 urban leaders in southern California to the premiere urban leadership conference in the country. In May of 2003, over 1,300 leaders attended the Urban Youth Workers Institute and received training from our 50 workshop speakers, 4 general sessions and an atmosphere of encouragement and support. This event has positioned UYWI as one of the primary urban training organizations in the country. In addition to urban leaders and churches seeking our input, Youth for Christ, Young Life, Youth Specialties, National Network of

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

Youth Ministries and many other youth ministry organizations have sought their advice in reaching the urban community.²⁷⁹

UYWI is an outstanding organization that, by all prevailing insight, has come to being “for such a time as this.” It has great potential, and is currently leading the way as far as providing training for urban youth leaders across the country.

One downside to UYWI as a model, is that it needs to avoid the “training-in-a-box” image it has to some. Because the training is a rotating smorgasbord of “Practical Ministry Essentials,” it doesn’t have the element of providing a “Principle-Based” curriculum that is transferable, consistent, and virtually timeless. This is one area that could be solidified.

Elim Community Corporation

One of the most effective, important and significant approaches to youth ministry in the city are current models involving mentoring young people. One such program, based in Buffalo, New York is the Elim Community Corporation Girls to Women / Boys to Men Mentoring Program. They point out the dire need for young girls and boys to have mentors in their lives, and have implemented a program, with extensive training requirements, to mentor young people in their community.

The program, directed by Tommy McClam is recognized as one of the most effective of its kind offered through a local church.²⁸⁰ They currently provide services for youth that include: Step Team, Interpretive Dance, Basketball Teams, College Prep Services, Internships, Camping experiences, and a College Tour experience.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Based on a discussion with Lynn Ziegenfuss, the director of the Mentoring Resource Program established by the National Network of Youth Ministry.

²⁸¹ Internal document provided by the Elim Community Corporation Mentoring Program.

Training is an integral component of the mentoring program, and every volunteer undergoes a thorough screening process, including background checks, and receives an initial training and subsequent ongoing training opportunities. According to their program document, there is a written training curriculum developed for mentors. Mentors are trained by program staff (orientation, follow-up sessions), workshops, and on-line education – Learn to Mentor (Basics of Mentoring and Becoming a Better Mentor; The National Mentor Partnership). Emphasis is placed on communications and relationship building to develop a trusting relationship. Mentors are trained to listen and become knowledgeable of the mentee’s interests and strengths, and to incorporate mentees into the decision-making process of the activities that they will participate in. Do’s and don’ts of managing a relationship are taught. Conflict resolution training is offered to assist the mentor in working with the youth through “role play” to control anger, and work at creating win-win situations. In addition, mentors are trained to assist mentees in their ability to solve their own problems emphasizing that they are capable of making positive decisions. On-going training is provided to mentors once a month with topics such as:

- diversity and cultural/ heritage sensitivity and appreciation,
- communications skills,
- crisis management,
- problem-solving,
- helping mentees set goals.
- child abuse and neglect,
- building self-esteem,
- career planning
- effective tutoring,
- sexuality,
- drug use
- gang activity,
- etc.²⁸²

²⁸² Ibid.

Urban Training Network

This author is the Founder and President of a program that provides training for youth leaders primarily working in an urban setting. The training was originally built on principles based on a training strategy designed by Dr. Barry St. Clair, the Founder and President of Reach Out Youth Solutions, located just outside Atlanta, Georgia. The Reach Out strategy, called: “Jesus-Focused Youth Ministry” is built on “Five-Core Principles of an Effective Youth Ministry.”²⁸³

Reach Out is based in the United States, and most of its U. S. training has been provided for predominantly suburban, middle-class, veteran, professional youth pastors. They have also developed an international ministry, taking their training to youth leaders around the world, including the Middle East, Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, South America and third-world countries, including Cuba.

In his work with Reach Out, this author developed a tremendous respect for Dr. Barry St. Clair, and honors his long-term commitment and tenacity in developing a global vision, and for providing quality training for youth leaders in America and around the world for over three decades.

One of the distinctives and strengths of Reach Out’s training, is that it is “principle-based”; not “topic-based.” In other words, the Reach Out Strategy is based on five principles rooted in the Biblical model of Jesus and His disciples, and are time-tested, Biblically-based principles which are applicable across cultures and in a variety of settings. This also provides a consistent approach when training leaders, and helps youth leaders form a “baseline” for effective ministry.

²⁸³ This author worked for Reach Out Youth Solutions for five years, and with permission, adapted principles from their *Core Strategy* to form the Urban Youth Ministry Strategy currently utilized in training youth leaders.

One question that arises, however, is how transferable those principles are across cultures, including across sub-cultures in the United States. I.e. Urban sub-cultures. One example of this breakdown is seen in their principle #5: “Penetrating the Student Culture.” This session deals with developing relationships with students, and primarily focuses on developing high school on-campus ministries. This is a needed and vital ministry, but in the urban context, there are two problems: Firstly, most urban leaders do not look at ministry in terms of “Campus Ministry,” but rather think in terms of “neighborhood” and “community.” The campus per se, is not the *venue* where one would most aptly assist a youth worker in the principle of “penetrating the student culture.”

The second reason this principle would be carried out differently for most urban youth leaders, is that most youth workers are part-time or volunteer leaders. So they are not as available to visit high school campuses as a full-time suburban youth leader might be. Thus the session would need to be adapted for an urban audience.

So although a valid topic for consideration, rather than focusing on the high school campus, training should focus more on “reaching students “in *their* world”; going where *they* hang out. The training would basically cover the same principle as presented by Reach Out, namely: “meeting students where they are”; but the *context* in which that principle is carried out is different. This is just one example of how the Reach Out strategy could be contextualized for the urban setting, but the essence of the principles being taught remain in tact.

Urban Youth Initiative (UYI)

Urban Youth Initiative (UYI) is a program based in Memphis, Tennessee and is dedicated to training youth leaders in the greater Memphis area. They have developed a

comprehensive program that partners with local churches, and assists them in their outreach to young people by providing them with youth leaders that they train, equip and empower to work with the youth at that church.

The program was founded by Dr. Larry Lloyd in 1993 and is currently coordinated by Cheryl Beard who serves as the Executive Director of the program. Their stated mission is to “ train and fund an ‘army’ of Christian, inner-city youth workers to impact at-risk urban teenagers with the life-changing message of God’s love and effectively help them reach their potential to become productive individuals.”²⁸⁴

They cite research from the Brookings Institute that shows that “church involvement is the single most important indicator that inner city young people will finish school; stay out of trouble, avoid gangs, crime and pregnancy; go to college; and gain employment ... Churches are leaving our inner cities for greener pastures and when they stay, churches are often ‘user unfriendly’ or ill-equipped for at-risk kids.”²⁸⁵

UYI believes in professional youth ministry. Based on their research and experience with successful youth ministries in the city, UYI holds as a core value the belief that churches need to invest in youth ministry. They are dedicated to this cause, and are very successful in fulfilling this mandate.

Program Plan

UYI recruits individuals to work with urban kids, and partners with the local church to provide funding, training, etc., for the leaders. The program offers a number of training topics for urban youth leaders. Training topics include, but are not limited to:

- Inner city youth culture

²⁸⁴ Based on a document produced by Urban Youth Initiative entitled: “Orientation Manual, 2006-2007.”

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 2.

- Youth evangelism and discipleship
- Camping ministries
- Holistic ministry to kids today
- Ministry to gang kids/gang culture
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Teen pregnancy and its prevention
- Networking with social services
- Fund raising
- Developing adult support
- Innovative approaches to youth ministry
- Inner city youth and today's church
- Job training for youth
- College readiness and youth
- Time management
- Child abuse and the youth worker's responsibilities
- Working with troubled youth
- Understanding the juvenile court
- How to recruit, train and maintain volunteers²⁸⁶

Limitations of the UYI Program

There are a few perceived limitations to making the UYI program transferable. One is the financial limitation. UYI has raised funding to underwrite a large part of the program. In partnership with the local church UYI will provide the salary for the youth worker they place in a given church, and they also underwrite the training, supervision and mentoring they provide for the youth leader. This is cost prohibitive for most urban ministries in the city, that struggle to maintain support levels just to remain in existence.

It is also difficult to find churches that would be willing to invest in a part-time youth pastor. Until and unless we change the “youth-ministry-should-be-run-by-volunteers” mentality of many urban churches, there will continue to be a “dumbing down” of the role of professional youth ministers.

²⁸⁶ Based on a document produced by Urban Youth Initiative entitled: “Youth Ministry Model, 2006-2007,” 5.

Another limitation is that the very nature of the model is such that it would require it to be localized, and over an extended period of time. Participants generally live in the area, and are committed to the community for long-term ministry. Although this is a good thing for their leaders, it raises the question of whether or not it is a transferable model. In other words, can the concept and materials be duplicated by others and implemented in other cities across of the country? Would UYI be willing to use their model as a “template” for others to use as they seek to train leaders? These questions would need to be explored.

CONCLUSION

Limitations of this Research

This was not an exhaustive study on *all* the training programs that currently exist; but an examination on the *need* for effective training programs; an analysis on essentials to cover in a training program; and an overview of some effective training that exists. Future studies should focus on how to streamline training, to make it consistent, transferable, and available to youth workers across the country.

Another thing for further consideration is how to produce materials that will benefit the local church and assist them in the task of reaching young people, and helping them find their place in the local church, providing opportunities for them to use their spiritual gifts for the glory of God.

For too long the urban church has neglected young people in the city. Although many realize there is a great need, and express a desire to reach them, there has been an enormous void in intentional strategies manifested by monetary investment and the hiring of personnel committed exclusively to youth ministry. It is time to stem the tide of the

mass exodus of young people from the church, and begin to be deliberate and intentional in forming strategies and training programs for implementing effective youth ministries.

Finally, since one key element to bringing hope to the city is through the development of the next generation, it is incumbent upon the current leadership of the church to ensure that provisions are made for their youth leaders to be trained. This author has made it his life's mission to the training and equipping of indigenous leaders for effective urban youth ministry. This author believes that without effective training, the future of the church is grim. The stakes are too high. We must safeguard the next generation of Christian leaders, by ensuring the current leaders are effectively reaching them and equipping them to take the mantle of leadership and continue to assist them in becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX 1

An Email from an Urban Youth Worker In Virginia

While finishing the final editing on this chapter, this author received an email that encapsulates the need for this work, and what he believes to be the overall sentiment and reality of a large number of urban youth ministries in America. It exemplifies why the sense of urgency regarding the current state of youth ministry in the urban church and the future it faces. The youth leader writes:

Can I ask for some of your wisdom? I belong to a very small church, with a very small youth group ... Committed adult workers is extremely few; it's me, my wife, and another sister who is okay, but her commitment to the group is very limited and of course there is no money. I (was) shocked when I heard another youth pastor say they had a budget; I didn't know such a thing existed ...

... I noticed from other churches that they have a special night just for the youth. In our church we only have the youth for 30 - 45 minutes on Sunday morning for Sunday School and then every 5th Sunday is youth Sunday. I've tried last year to break the normal 5th Sunday flow to make it more youth orientated but my pastor seems to want it to follow the adult format.

One of the things I'd like to ask you, is should I try to have special weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly youth service? I've been trying to figure out how to overcome the music obstacle. Only one of the youth is musically inclined, he's the church drummer ... So, I've been wondering how would I do praise and worship? Thus far the other churches youth groups that I visited had their own youth band ...

... Next, our church is in one of the high crime areas in Norfolk, VA (Yeah there's crime here too) it's my desire to reach out to the community and invite teens from the community in but I can't seem to develop something that will interest the neighborhood kids to come. Any suggestions?

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VITA

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